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**The real gladiators**

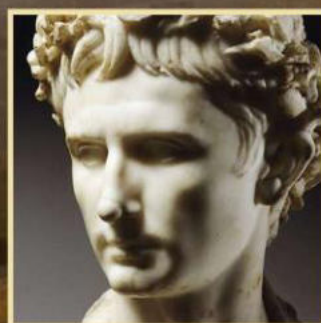
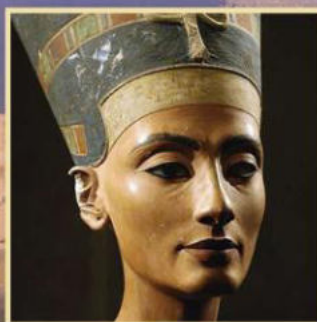
**Uncovering Pompeii**

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**Greek democracy**

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ISSN: 1469 8552

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Who could fail to be fascinated by the ancient world? From the pyramids of Egypt to the great emperors of Rome, it is filled with astonishing stories, momentous achievements and people who can be both surprisingly similar and utterly different to those of today.

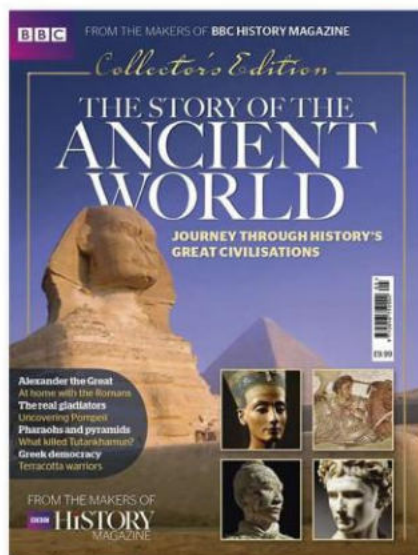
In this special edition of *BBC History Magazine*, some of the world's leading experts on ancient history will give you the lowdown on the key events and themes of the distant past. Among other things, you will discover the secrets of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the workings of Greek democracy, the private lives of the Romans and the truth behind the Maya vision of an apocalypse. Plus you will get to meet some of the most remarkable individuals to have populated this era, including Alexander the Great, Tutankhamun and Julius Caesar.

We have produced this special edition by bringing together some of the best articles on the ancient world to have appeared in *BBC History Magazine* over recent years. I hope that you find it an enjoyable read and do check out our monthly magazine – if you haven't already – where we will continue to explore the stories of these amazing civilisations.

## Rob Attar

Editor

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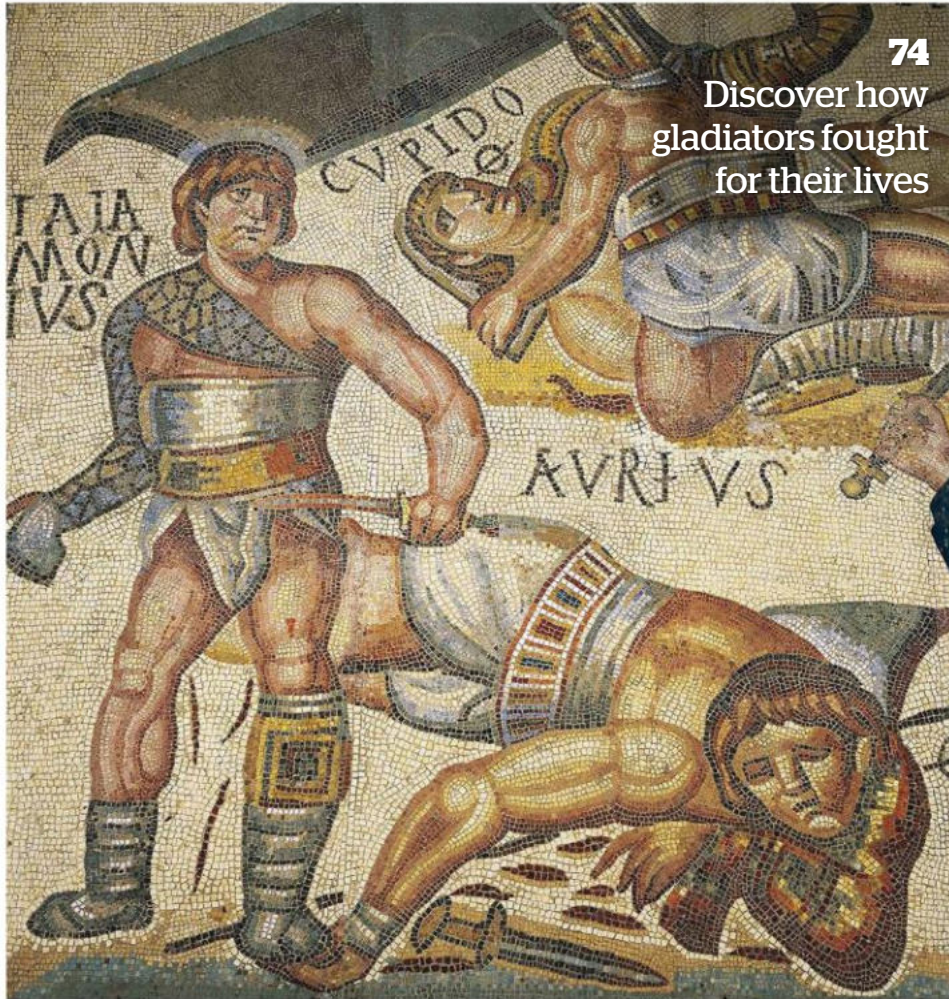


“There has never been a **more thrilling time to read about the ancient world** – nor, perhaps, a greater urgency to understand it”

Historian **TOM HOLLAND** writes about the continuing importance of the ancient world on page 114



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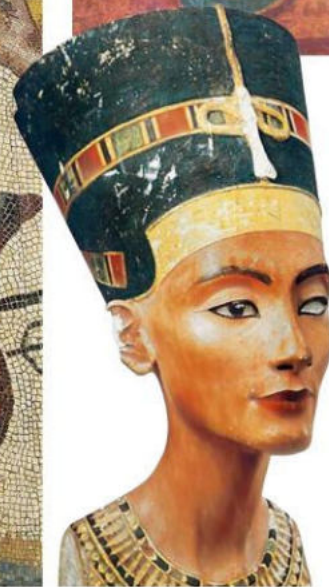
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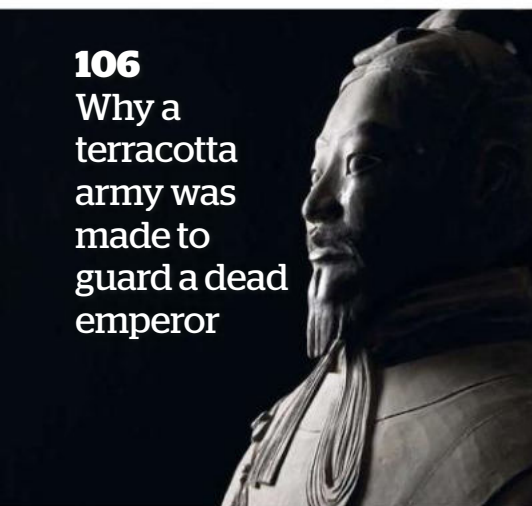




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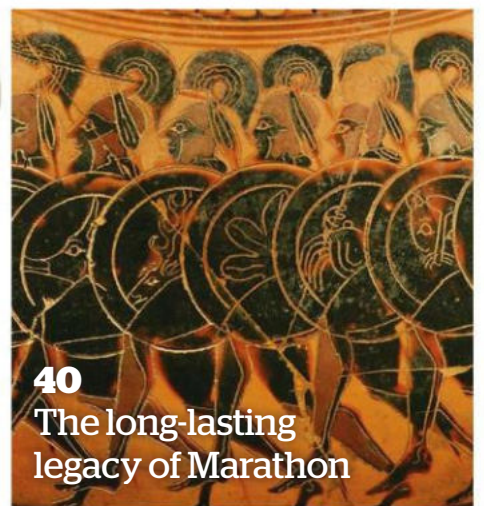
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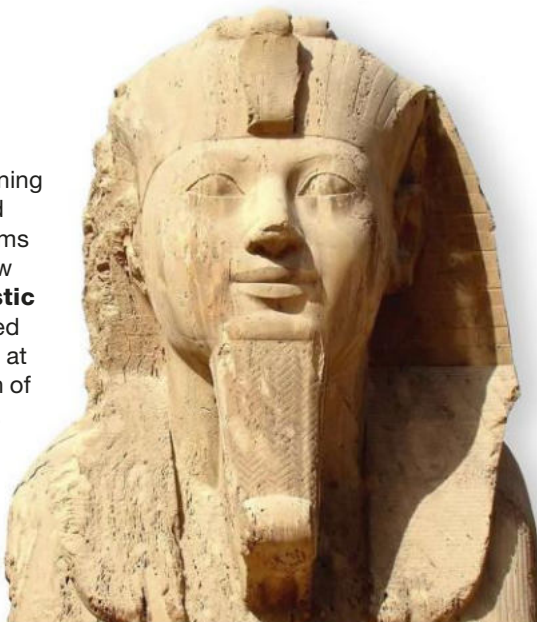
## Evolution of ancient empires

**Peter Jones** highlights the most significant moments in the history of the world's first great civilisations

### c3100 BC

**King Menes** rules over a newly united Egypt, joining the Upper (southern) and Lower (northern) Kingdoms at the start of what is now termed the **Early Dynastic Period**. Menes is credited with founding the capital at Memphis, 15 miles south of the modern city of Cairo.

The alabaster sphinx at Memphis was probably carved between 1700 BC and 1400 BC



### c1550 BC

The Theban rulers of Egypt's 17th Dynasty drive out the Hyksos – a group of people from western Asia – from the Nile delta region, launching the so-called **New Kingdom period** that lasted till c1070 BC. This new dynasty of **pharaohs** are buried in deep, rock-cut tombs in the Valley of the Kings on the west bank of the Nile opposite their capital, Thebes (modern-day Luxor).

3000 BC

2500 BC

2000 BC

1500 BC

### c2686 BC

The period known as the **Old Kingdom** of ancient Egypt begins with the founding of the Third Dynasty. A series of **great pyramids** is built, beginning with Djoser's step pyramid at Saqqara (c2650 BC), followed by the three great pyramids of the Fourth Dynasty at Giza.

The tomb of Pharaoh Djoser, built at Saqqara, was the first of Egypt's pyramid tombs



### c1450 BC

The dominant civilisation of **Crete**, dubbed the **Minoan culture** by modern archaeologists, is overrun by Mycenaean Greeks from the mainland; soon afterwards, a mysterious cataclysm devastates the island. This successful society, which featured bull and snake-revering cults, produced fine art, and traded for minerals across the eastern Mediterranean.



Figurines of snake goddesses were found at Minoan sites across Crete – this one dates from around 1600 BC





Beautiful paintings adorned the tomb-chapel of the wealthy official Nebamun near Thebes – many are now on display in the British Museum

## c1323 BC

The Egyptian boy king **Tutankhamun** dies, aged around 18, and is buried in the **Valley of the Kings** in a spectacular golden coffin. Tutankhamun had restored the ancient pantheon of gods after his father, Akhenaten, had installed the sun-disc Aten as the only deity.



This solid-gold death mask, thought to be that of the boy king Tutankhamun, was discovered in 1924



The Roman Forum, the central plaza of the ancient city dotted with temples and government buildings, was established before the republic was created

## 509 BC

The last king of Rome, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, is deposed in a revolt. After further disquiet, two legislative bodies of citizens are established, creating a **Roman republic** that endures for nearly five centuries.

## 1000 BC

## 750 BC

## 500 BC

Subjects pay tribute on a c5th-century BC frieze in the Apadana (audience hall) in Persepolis, capital of the Persian empire



## 559 BC

**Cyrus II** becomes king of the vassal state of Persia. Conquering the Medes in 550 BC and Babylon in 539 BC, he founds the mighty **Persian (Achaemenid) empire** that within a century controls nearly 50 million people – 44 per cent of the world's population. In 525 BC his son Cambyses conquers Egypt.

## 508 BC

**Cleisthenes** reforms the constitution of Athens, giving each adult male citizen a say in the government of the city by contributing to decisions made in the *Ecclesia* (Assembly) – creating the **system of democracy** (from the Greek *demos*, meaning 'people', and *kratos*, 'power').



Steps lead to the speaker's platform of the Pnyx, the rocky hill in Athens where the *Ecclesia* (Assembly) gathered



# Timeline

## 490 BC

The 600-strong fleet of the Persian king Darius lands on the Greek coast at Marathon, determined to punish Athens for its role in a revolt in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). **Athenian forces led by Miltiades**, supported by the city-state of Plataea, attack at pace, taking the Persians by surprise and driving them into the sea. A messenger, Pheidippides, is reputedly dispatched to request help from the Spartans before **the battle of Marathon**.



Athenian general Miltiades inscribed this helmet to commemorate victory over Persia at Marathon

The first Roman gold coin was struck in 215 BC to finance the second Punic War against Carthage



## 241 BC

**Rome defeats Carthage** at the battle of the Egadi Islands near Sicily, concluding its victory in the first Punic War and establishing its **dominance across the western Mediterranean**. Over the following three centuries, Greece, north Africa, Spain, Gaul, Egypt and Britain are subjugated, becoming Roman provinces.



Octavian's triumph over the fleet of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BC is depicted in a 1st-century AD relief

400 BC

300 BC

200 BC

100 BC

This Roman mosaic at Pompeii depicts Alexander the Great at the battle of Issus



## 336 BC

**Alexander III** inherits Macedon from his father, Philip II, who had plotted to break the power of the Persian empire. Alexander becomes known as 'the Great' for his **succession of conquests**. His army sweeps through the Middle East, Egypt and Asia, as far as India, before his death in 323 BC, creating a vast empire.

## 221 BC

**Ying Zheng, the king of Qin**, completes his conquest of competing states, creating a Chinese state that effectively continues to this day, and takes a new title, Qin Shihuangdi: 'Divine August Emperor of Qin' – **the First Emperor**. After his death in 210 BC, his tomb is guarded by an army of some 8,000 terracotta warriors.



The Terracotta Army – some 8,000 warriors guarding the tomb of China's first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi – was discovered near Xi'an in 1974





## 2 September 31 BC

**Octavian** defeats the forces of Roman general Mark Antony and Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt at the **battle of Actium** in the waters off Greece, cementing his rule of Rome. Four years later he takes the name **Augustus**, marking the end of the Republic and the birth of the Roman empire. Egypt becomes a Roman province.

Octavian became known as **Augustus** in 27 BC



The step pyramid known as El Castillo, built by the Maya by the 12th century AD, dominates Chichen Itza, Mexico

## c250 AD

The Maya begin to build **huge pyramids**, of which some of the later examples include **El Castillo** at the city of Chichen Itza in Mexico. Other great cities built in Central America include Tikal in Guatemala, Copán in Honduras and Lamanai in Belize.

AD1

AD100

AD200

AD300

AD400

AD500

**Vesuvius** looms over the ruins of Pompeii – one of the towns buried by the eruption of AD 79 – now excavated to reveal insights into everyday Roman life

## 24 August AD 79

**Vesuvius**, a volcano believed by local residents to be dormant or extinct, erupts with tremendous force, **burying the nearby cities of Pompeii** and Herculaneum under up to 6 metres (20 feet) of ash, pumice and rock. Pompeii had been a thriving agricultural city, grown prosperous thanks largely to wine produced from the grapes grown in the fertile volcanic soil.



The sack of Rome by the Visigoths under Alaric in AD 410 is depicted in an engraving

## 24 August AD 410

**Rome is sacked by the Visigoths** under Alaric – the first time the 'eternal city' has fallen in nearly 800 years. Though the capital had moved to Ravenna in 402, the attack shocks the western Roman empire after a century of decline. Rome is sacked again in 455, by the Vandals under Geiseric; the **last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus**, is deposed in 476. 🏛️



# EGYPT





# EGYPTIANS

Unearth the secrets of the great civilisation that emerged along the Nile over 5,000 years ago, famed for royal burials and remarkable pharaohs







A detail from the canopic shrine of Tutankhamun, showing the protective god Hapy and the goddess Nephthys. This held miniature coffins containing the boy-king's viscera



# Revelations in the Valley of the Kings

The discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun nearly a century ago was far from the end of archaeological revelations in Egypt's famed royal cemetery. **Aidan Dodson** explores the treasures that have been unearthed since Howard Carter located King Tut's golden coffin

**E**ven with its hordes of tourists, the Valley of the Kings still retains the aura of the magical machine in which the pharaohs went to join the gods. Work continues on tombs, and discoveries are made all the time, yet at various stages during the 20th century archaeologists believed that the valley's treasures had all been found.

In 1932 Howard Carter completed his decade of work on Tutankhamun's tomb. Excavations had been ongoing in the valley since the Paduan explorer Giovanni Belzoni found the tombs of kings Ay, Ramesses I and Sethy I (late 14th and early 13th centuries BC) in 1816–17, thus adding to the dozen or so

sepulchres that had lain open since antiquity. On his return to Europe, Belzoni had declared that, in his "firm opinion... there are no more [tombs] than are now known".

Undeterred, Victor Loret, head of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, found more royal and non-royal tombs in 1898. Between 1902 and 1912, American lawyer Theodore Davis uncovered more tombs of kings, their families and officials; he then echoed Belzoni: "I fear that the Valley of the Kings is now exhausted."

Then came Carter's discovery, in November 1922, of Tutankhamun's almost untouched tomb. At that point the general opinion was that the site really had revealed its last secret.

However, by the late 1960s views were changing. Though it was generally doubted

that new tombs would be found, it was clear that many open ones had never been scientifically recorded, and that many shafts, corridors and chambers were still choked with debris.

In 1972, as 'Tutmania' gripped the western world, American Egyptologist Otto Schaden led the first archaeological expedition into the valley since Carter's day. His objective was the tomb of King Ay, Tutankhamun's successor. Belzoni had found Ay's tomb back in 1816, but debris still filled many of the rooms. By removing this, Schaden revealed the missing lid of the king's sarcophagus.

By the 1970s there were also concerns that environmental changes, brought about in part by the recent creation of the massive Lake Nasser by the construction of the Aswan Dam



150 miles (250km) south of the valley, might be harming some of the tombs. Thus the next expedition, begun in 1978 under the leadership of British draughtsman John Romer, had as a key objective the gathering of geological and conservation data throughout the valley. But in the 1979 season the tombs built for Ramesses X and XI (early 11th century BC) – the last two to be cut in the valley – were investigated. Neither seemed to have been used, and they had stood open since their builders abandoned them.

Ramesses X's tomb had, for many years from 1903, housed the electric generator for the valley, and only a few traces of decoration were visible. These were photographed by Romer's team, which also recorded the decoration of Ramesses I's tomb, found so many years earlier by Belzoni but largely ignored since. Ramesses X's tomb was later worked on by a Swiss expedition led by Hanna Jenni since 1998.

In addition to recording the few drawings in Ramesses XI's tomb, the archaeologists began clearing the debris that filled a deep shaft in the middle of its burial chamber. It proved to contain the smashed remains of coffins and other tomb equipment. Some came from an intrusive burial made in the tomb two centuries after its abandonment, others from the tomb's use as a workshop by cemetery officials charged with clearing robbed tombs in the valley after an orgy of looting in the 12th and 11th centuries BC. From Ramesses XI's own time came only some small plaques and beeswax figurines, discovered in foundation deposits around the mouth of the shaft.

In 1978 the Theban Mapping Project had been founded by American Egyptologist Kent Weeks with the aim of producing a definitive map of the west bank of the Nile at Luxor – the cemetery of ancient Thebes that includes the Valley of the Kings and much else besides. Its fundamental purpose was to survey the standing monuments, but also to undertake modest clearance to clarify a point of detail.

As such, in 1987 it relocated a tomb that had been known in the 19th and early 20th centuries but had been covered by a car park. At that time it had been given the official

**“Crawling through debris-choked rooms, the American archaeologist stumbled on a whole complex of corridors and chambers”**

# The Valley of the Kings

Explore one of the world's richest archaeological sites with a map that details the position of the tombs and outlines some of its ancient secrets

MAP ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID ATKINSON



## Where is it?

Across the Nile from the city of Luxor in east-central Egypt, 300 miles south of Cairo

## What is it?

A desert valley lined with burial chambers – some 25 tombs of kings of Egypt and another 40 tombs of nobles and members of the royal family. Those of the kings are usually richly decorated with religious scenes and texts.

## When was it used?

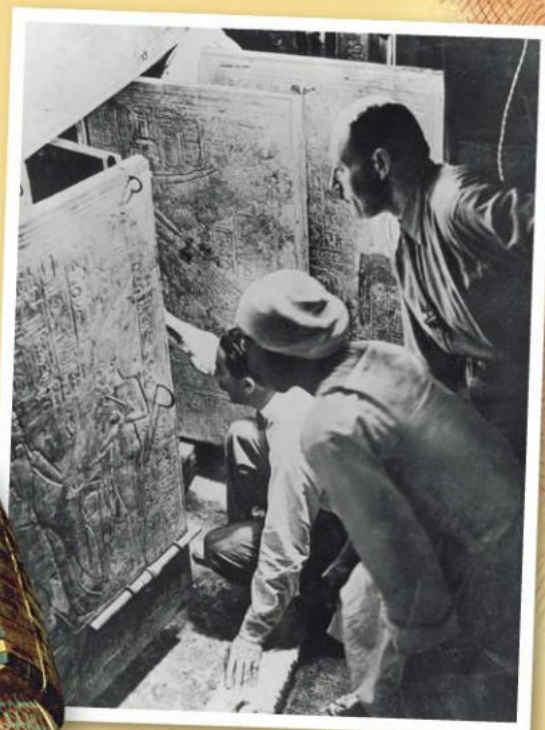
During the Egyptian New Kingdom, between about 1500 and 1070 BC.

## Why is it important?

It contains the tombs of some of the most notable individuals in Egyptian history, and gives significant clues to their careers and the religious beliefs of the time.



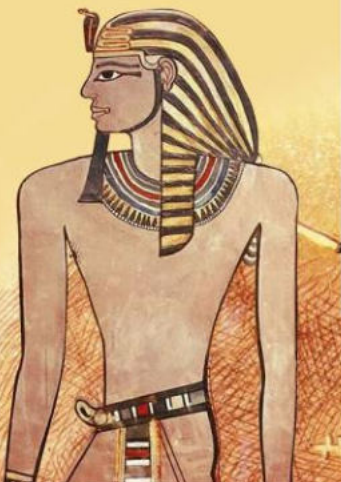
The Valley of the Kings at dusk. The entrances to the tombs of Tutankhamun and Ramesses VI can be seen



ABOVE: Carter's team pose for a 1924 reconstruction of their investigation of Tutankhamun's tomb. LEFT: Tut's middle coffin is covered with sheet gold and inlaid with glass







### The hidden mummies

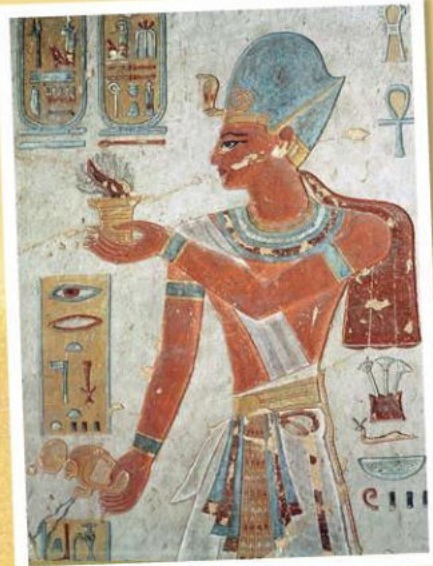
The tomb of Amenhotep II (late 15th century BC, pictured above) was used to hide a number of royal mummies rescued from their robbed tombs during the 11th and 10th centuries BC. They were still there when the tomb was opened in 1898, and are now in the Cairo Museum.

### Tutankhamun's tomb

The tomb of Tutankhamun was found in 1922 and proved to be the only largely untouched tomb in the valley. Its contents are now in the Cairo and Luxor museums, though the king's sarcophagus, outer coffin and mummy may still be seen by visitors.

### The largest tomb

KV5 is the largest subterranean tomb in Egypt. It was constructed by Ramesses II for at least some of his 50 sons. It is still under excavation after two decades and is not open to the public.



A wall relief of Ramesses II

### Ramesses' unused tomb

The last tomb to be cut in the valley was that of Ramesses XI, but it was not used for his burial. He may have been buried somewhere in northern Egypt.

### The big discovery

In 2006 tomb KV63 was discovered. It contained the leftovers from the embalming of Tutankhamun.

### The priestess

The latest new discovery of a tomb in the Valley is KV64, holding the body of a priestess of around 900 BC.

### Sethy I's tomb

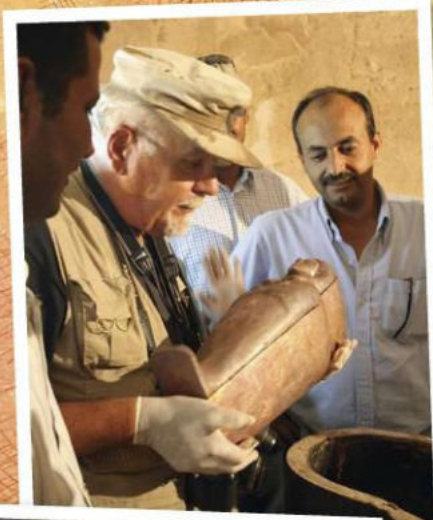
Perhaps the finest tomb is that of Sethy I – the first to be decorated throughout in painted relief. Found by Belzoni in 1817, it has been badly damaged by flooding and the mutilation of many of its paintings, and has been closed for some years.

### The earliest tomb

The earliest tomb in the valley sometimes open to the public is that of Thutmose III (mid-15th century BC). Its burial chamber is decorated as though a huge papyrus scroll has been unrolled against the walls.

### The female pharaoh

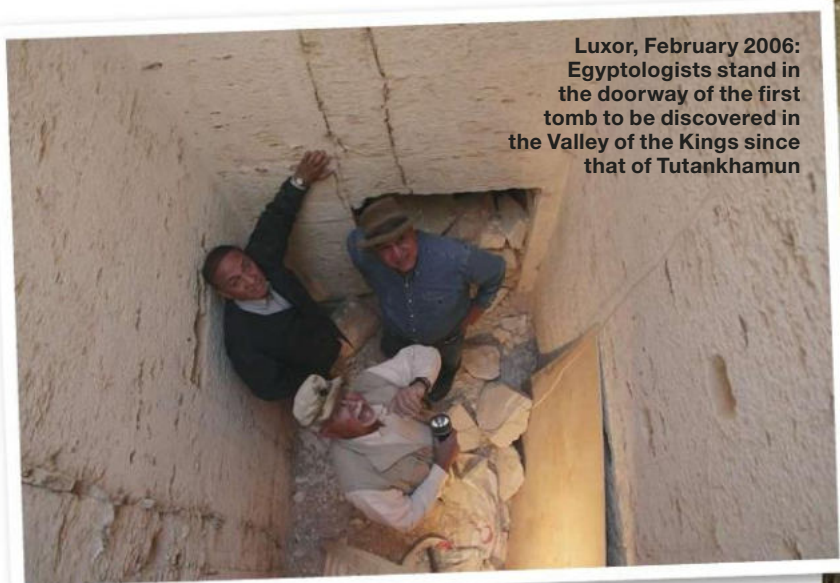
Tawosret was one of the few women to become a pharaoh, seizing the throne in the early 12th century BC. After she was overthrown, her tomb was used for her vanquisher, Sethnakhte. His names can be seen painted on the plaster that was used to obliterate the images of the queen.



ABOVE: Dr Otto Schaden began excavating the tomb of Amenmesse in 1992, discovering wooden coffins and these pottery jars containing the embalming debris of Tutankhamun







Luxor, February 2006:  
Egyptologists stand in  
the doorway of the first  
tomb to be discovered in  
the Valley of the Kings since  
that of Tutankhamun

### **“A section of this area had been left un-dug when Carter found traces of Tutankhamun’s tomb”**



In Egyptian art females are  
depicted with yellow faces.  
This figure is carved on  
a coffin in tomb KV63

number KV5; indeed, nearly all tombs in the valley have such an official number, allocated since the late 19th century in order of discovery (Tutankhamun’s is KV62). An old plan of KV5 existed, but the team was keen to verify it.

Though the old plan by Scottish explorer Robert Hay proved to be accurate, it told less than half the story. While crawling through the debris-choked rooms, Weeks stumbled on a whole complex of hitherto unknown corridors and chambers – at least 130 – that is still being cleared. The tomb housed at least some of the 50 sons of Ramesses II (13th century BC).

Another tomb, KV39, was cleared in 1989, nearly 90 years after its discovery. Experts remain divided on its ownership but it was clearly intended for more than one burial, and the remains of a number of mummies and coffins have been discovered. Names found on foundation deposits suggest that KV39 may be the burial place of some of the children of Amenhotep II (late 15th century BC).

At the same time, Japanese Egyptologists Sakuji Yoshimura and Jiro Kondo started a long-term project to re-clear and conserve the tomb of Tutankhamun’s grandfather Amenhotep III (mid-14th century BC), last worked on by Carter in 1915.

#### **Noble tombs**

In 1989, American archaeologist Don Ryan turned his attention to a long-neglected set of tombs intended for minor members of the royal family and the nobility. Just over one-third of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings were built for kings; the rest are generally

much smaller tombs comprising only one or two chambers. Few of their owners are known with certainty, but they include at least one vizier (prime minister). Most nobles were buried close to their rock-cut mortuary chapels on the opposite side of the cliffs from the valley, but some of the most favoured were granted rest close to their divine kings.

These tombs had been found by various excavators during the 19th and early 20th centuries, but largely passed over with minimal comment. Ryan re-investigated some of them with modern methods. Six tombs were worked on between 1989 and 1991 and again in 1993, with work resuming in 2006.

Some nobles had substantial tombs in the valley. Between 1988 and 1994 German Egyptologist Hartwig Altenmüller cleared out the tomb of the early 12th-century BC chancellor Bay. He found that, after the disgrace of its owner, the tomb had been reused later that century for the burial of two princes, whose sarcophagi were still in place.

Another tomb in which the inner rooms had been choked with flood debris was that of King Amenmesse (early 12th century BC). Debris removal was begun by Otto Schaden in 1992; his work showed that the tomb was unfinished, and also that some paintings seen by 19th-century explorers in one of the rooms had now almost completely disappeared, demonstrating the need for full documentation of the tombs.

There remained a small part of the valley that was wholly virgin. When Carter discovered Tutankhamun he had been in the process of systematically clearing the last area in the

valley that had not been dug in modern times. He had also found workmen’s huts dating to around 1180 BC lying not far below the surface, which meant that the layers below them had not been touched since that time. A significant section of this area had been left un-dug when Carter found the first traces of Tutankhamun’s tomb, and remained unknown territory.

Yet more intriguing was the fact that the only tombs found in this part of the valley belonged to the mysterious Amarna Period in the late 14th century BC during which the Egyptian pantheon of gods had been replaced by a single sun-god under the auspices of King Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti. One of these tombs was that of Tutankhamun, the other, KV55, a strange hiding place with a mummy that some believe to be Akhenaten himself, though others argue it to be his son-in-law Smenkhkare. Might the area hold more tombs – one of them perhaps that of Nefertiti?

The Amarna Royal Tombs Project (ARTP), led by Nicholas Reeves and Geoffrey Martin, worked in the area between 1998 and 2002. Though no tomb was found, much of the workmen’s settlement was uncovered, together with ancient graffiti and various small objects. The team re-cleared the ‘Gold Tomb’, a pit found by Davis in 1908 that contained royal jewellery from the 13th century BC.

Meanwhile, Otto Schaden continued his clearance of the nearby tomb of Amenmesse. In addition to the tomb’s interior, he was also interested in what might lie outside its entrance, particularly whether any of the customary foundation deposits might survive.





Examining a door-lined hallway in KV5, built for sons of Ramesses II

On 10 March 2005 a shaft was found to the left of the tomb entrance. It was not till February 2006 that the shaft was fully cleared, accompanied by a formal announcement of the find by Dr Zahi Hawass, head of the Egyptian Supreme Council for Antiquities, which governs all archaeological research in Egypt.

### Headline news

The news that a new tomb, numbered KV63, had been found flashed around the world. What – or who – might it contain? The mystery thickened when the first images of the interior showed what turned out to be seven black coffins (one apparently containing a mummy), together with 28 huge sealed pottery jars. Was this a reburial of royal mummies, the remains of a family of a pharaoh's loyal retainers, or something else?

Not one of the coffins contained a body. The 'mummy' turned out to be feather pillows, and as the archaeologists carefully worked through the tomb it became clear that its contents were the leftovers from the mummification of a corpse. Such embalmers' caches are not unknown, and were intended to safeguard material that had been in contact with a high-status body (and which thus contained some of its sacred essence). A smaller cache with material from Tutankhamun's burial had been found in 1907. From whose burial might this one be?


Seal-impressions in the jars hinted to a date around the reign of Tutankhamun, but the definitive evidence came from another piece of new work in the valley. British engineer Stephen Cross had been studying the layers left by ancient floods, caused by storms in the high desert that carried large amounts of rock and other debris into the long-dry watercourses that make up the Valley of the Kings. One of his most important conclusions was that within weeks of Tutankhamun's burial, the tomb had been sealed underneath such a

flood-layer – one that was not penetrated until 1922. This dated the ancient attempt to rob the tomb to this brief window of opportunity. As the layer also covered KV63 and KV55, both must have been closed for the last time no later than shortly after Tutankhamun's funeral. KV63 was thus confirmed as the main embalming cache of Tutankhamun, and the 1907 cache as containing items overlooked when KV63 was closed.

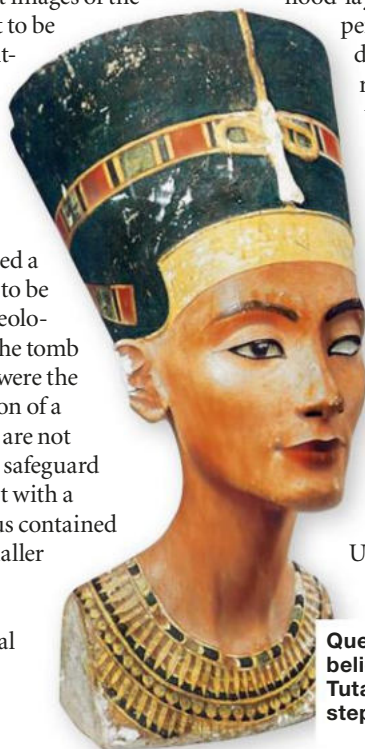
Since 2009 a team led by Susanne Bickel from the University of Basel, Switzerland had been

examining in detail a series of long-known smaller tombs in the southern branch of the valley, belonging originally to members of the royal family and nobility. In January 2011 they found the mouth of a previously unknown tomb-shaft. Political upheaval prevented excavation until January 2012, when the newly numbered KV64 revealed the intact burial of the priestess Nehmesbast, who had lived around 900 BC, with her coffin, mummy and stela [stone slabs]. She had not, however, been the original owner of the tomb; under the layer of debris upon which Nehmesbast had been placed were found the remains of a burial, probably of a princess, from 500 years earlier.

This original interment had been robbed sometime during the 11th century BC – like many tombs, another being the adjacent KV40 which, though located, had not been entered by archaeologists before the Swiss in 2011–12. In this case, however, the tomb had originally held not one person, but at least 33 burials of royal children and their attendants. A similar number of secondary burials had been placed atop their robbed remains around the 10th century BC, themselves later plundered.

The discoveries of KV63 and KV64 are further demonstrations of the folly of ever declaring that the Valley of the Kings – or any other archaeological site, for that matter – has been “exhausted”. 

**Aidan Dodson** is a senior research fellow in archaeology at Bristol University. His latest book, *The Royal Tombs of Ancient Egypt*, is due to be published by Pen & Sword in 2016



Queen Nefertiti is believed to have been Tutankhamun's stepmother



# TUTANKHAMUN BEHIND THE MASK

We know much about the treasures of Tutankhamun's tomb, but what do we know of the daily life of the famous boy king? **Charlotte Booth** reveals the hobbies and pastimes of the ancient Egyptian monarch

Many people have gazed in awe at the golden mask of Tutankhamun, wondering at the workmanship, the material or the beauty of it. However, few think of the person who wore it for thousands of years, and even fewer know or care that he was decapitated by archaeologists so they could remove the mask and present it to the world.

Perhaps if a name is added it becomes more real: "Tutankhamun was decapitated." No, that's still not real enough because though the name is familiar it is still from another time and world. Replace his name with one more familiar – "John was decapitated" – and suddenly it all seems more real, a name we associate with friends or family. This familiarity associated with the name John was felt in 1325 BC towards the young boy Tutankhamun. He, like John, was someone's brother, son, husband or friend – in short, a real person with the same drives and motivations as John has today.

Tutankhamun was born c1334 BC, possibly at Amarna, the city of his father, Akhenaten (though Tutankhamun's parentage is hotly disputed). A religious revolutionary, Akhenaten closed all of the temples in Egypt, diverting their revenue to the cult of the Aten (the solar disc) worshipped at Amarna. Many incorrectly assume, because of this religious change, that Akhenaten was a monotheist. Although he banned the worship of all other gods except the Aten, only himself and the royal family could worship the Aten directly.

Everyone else had access to the god only through him, almost as though he were equal to the god. Therefore there were two gods: the Aten and Akhenaten.

Akhenaten focused all of his energies on his new city and his religion, rarely leaving the boundaries of Amarna. For a priest this would have been appropriate but for a king it was not, and the power Egypt held in the near east slowly diminished as he neglected his vassal rulers, enabling the growing Hittite army to gain control of the region.

It was into this era of political instability and religious zealotry that Tutankhamun was born. He was raised at Amarna and sheltered from the political unease sweeping the country. It was only after a plague in Amarna wiped out many members of his family that

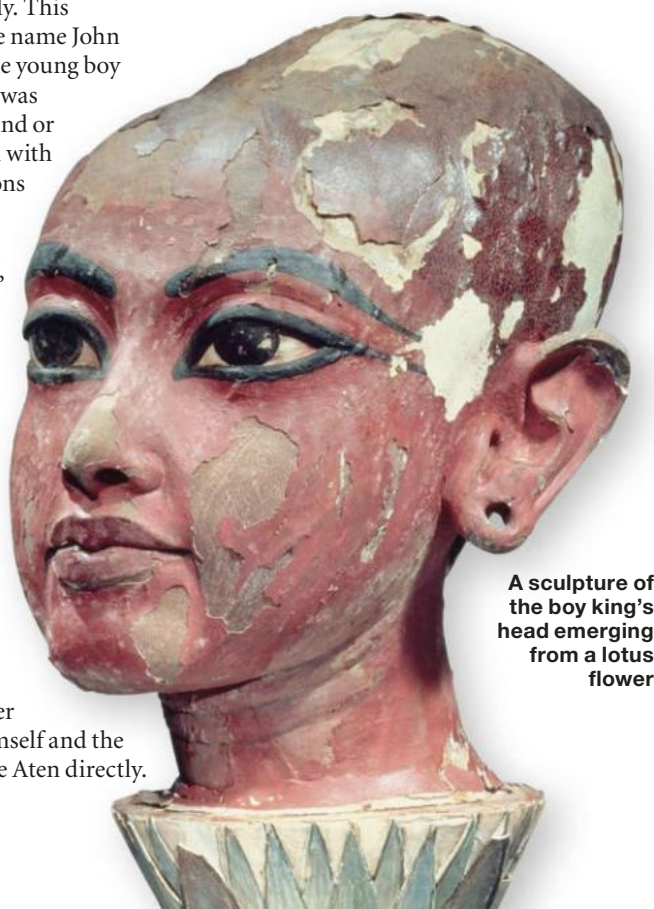
the young boy, only eight years old, was thrust into the adult political world as king.

Tutankhamun ruled Egypt for some 10 years, dying when he was about 18 years old. Some believed his death was due to foul play – that he was killed when he reached an age at which he was becoming difficult to control. However, his body has been well studied and it is now commonly accepted that he died in a chariot accident.

The debate about the cause of his death will no doubt continue for years to come. Yet very few studies have covered the 18 years of Tutankhamun's life, though a number of personal belongings from his tomb give an indication of who this boy may have been.

As a youngster Tutankhamun was an outdoors type – all scraped knees and muddy sandals. It was clear that he learned survival skills: among his collection of walking sticks was a reed example set in gold, inscribed with "a reed which his majesty cut with his own hand", indicating that he had sat down and carved this stick using a sharp tool. He was obviously very proud of this achievement, and someone had set it into a handle, either as a sign of indulgence or genuine admiration at the young boy's talents.

Further evidence of such outdoor pursuits can be seen in the fire-drill that was found in his tomb. This consisted of two parts – a base



A sculpture of the boy king's head emerging from a lotus flower

**"As a youngster Tutankhamun was an outdoors type of boy - all scraped knees and muddy shoes"**



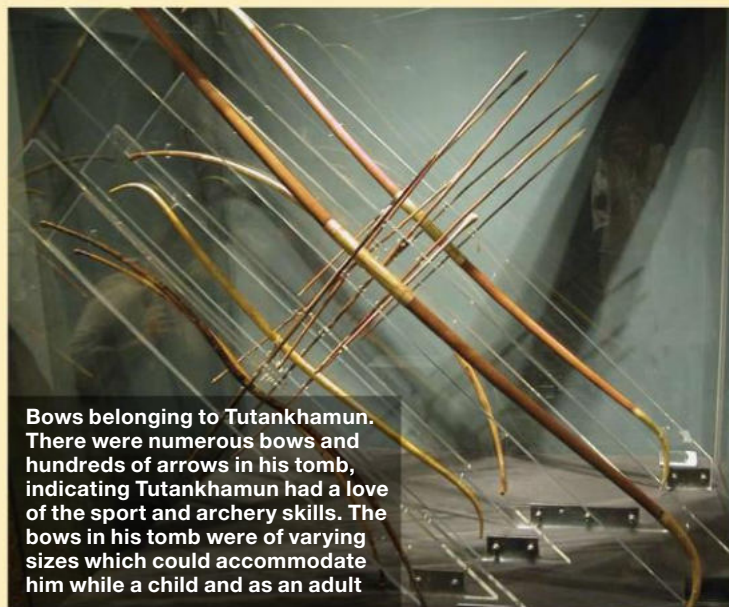
# Sport and spoils

Here are some of the trappings that tell of the king's life

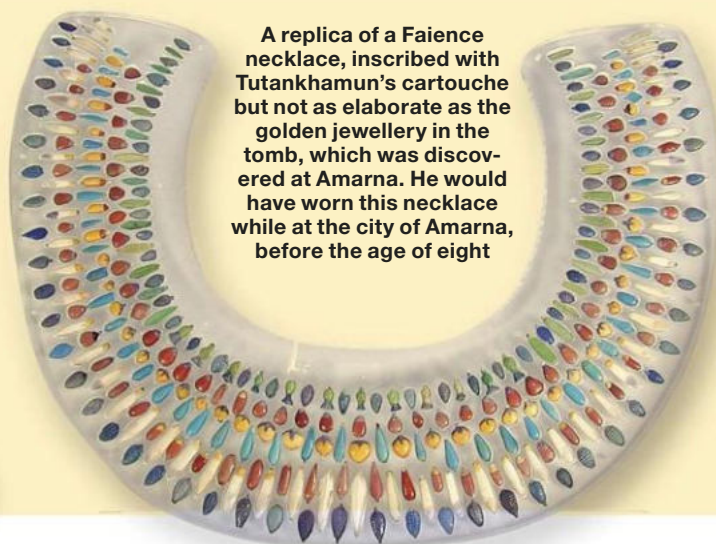


Tutankhamun and his wife Ankhesenamun are pictured in painted limestone in his tomb

A fire drill similar to that found in Tutankhamun's tomb. The depressions were filled with kindling. The stick would be rotated in the hands or by use of a bow drill. Tutankhamun may have used his while on nocturnal jaunts into the desert



Bows belonging to Tutankhamun. There were numerous bows and hundreds of arrows in his tomb, indicating Tutankhamun had a love of the sport and archery skills. The bows in his tomb were of varying sizes which could accommodate him while a child and as an adult



A replica of a Faience necklace, inscribed with Tutankhamun's cartouche but not as elaborate as the golden jewellery in the tomb, which was discovered at Amarna. He would have worn this necklace while at the city of Amarna, before the age of eight

with little holes carved into it and a stick that was placed within the holes and rubbed until a spark was produced.

These survival skills were very useful for the young prince (and, later, king). He was very fond of hunting and chariot racing. Though traditional royal objects in his tomb bear numerous images of the king participating in these pursuits, there is enough evidence to suggest these were real hobbies, and not merely depicted for propaganda purposes.

The arts of warfare and charioteering were part of the traditional royal education, taught to Tutankhamun from as young as five years old. His tomb contained various small-scale weapons including throwsticks, slingshots, scimitar

swords and bows and arrows. Small-sized gloves used for charioteering and horse-riding were also buried with him. It is quite probable that Tutankhamun participated in the daily chariot parades in Amarna, giving the people of the city opportunities to see the king Akhenaten and the royal family.

Tutankhamun's tomb also boasted four well-used hunting chariots, which he may have ridden out into the desert to hunt lion, gazelle and wild bull – the prey getting bigger and wilder as he became stronger and older. An image – not from his tomb, but rather from a reused talatat block from the ninth pylon at Karnak – shows Tutankhamun participating in a lion and bull hunt, showing his skill and

prowess in the field.

Perhaps the ostrich feathers adorning his famous golden fan were taken from a bird felled by the king, and perhaps there were many feasts in the palace boosted by wild hare, gazelle and bull hunted by the young Tutankhamun. Or perhaps he was not talented at hunting or charioteering at all, but just loved the thrill of the chase.

We will never fully understand the life of this enigmatic boy king but we can at least relate to the excitement and anticipation he felt when he was climbing into his chariot staring at the flat desert ahead of him, knowing that, for the next few hours at least, he could forget about palace intrigue, political instability and religious revolutions. It was just him, his horses and the desert. **H**



The face of Tutankhamun, as revealed to the public for the first time in 2007

Charlotte Booth teaches Egyptology. Her books include *The Boy Behind the Mask: Meeting the Real Tutankhamun* (Oneworld Publications, 2007) upon which this article is based



## THE **HISTORY** ESSAY



The archaeologist Howard Carter examines Tutankhamun's coffin. Carter lamented how little we know about the boy king's life and death, but modern investigative techniques are slowly shining a light into the gloom

# WHAT KILLED TUTANKHAMUN?

Ever since Howard Carter found his tomb more than 90 years ago, Egyptologists have been striving to establish how the pharaoh met his end

**By Chris Naunton**



In 1922, Howard Carter and his team made what would become perhaps the greatest archaeological discovery of all time. It was the intact tomb of an Egyptian pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty: Tutankhamun. The ‘boy king’ has since become one of the most famous figures from the ancient world, and his face – more

particularly his golden death mask – provides us with one of the most iconic images from anywhere, and at any time.

The Valley of the Kings was the burial place of the pharaohs throughout the great era we now call the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC), and its use helps to define the period.

Fast-forward 3,000 years, and the valley was the site of a series of spectacular discoveries in the 19th and early 20th centuries AD. A map made by Napoleon’s scientific expedition in the early 1800s recorded the position of 16 tombs. By the outbreak of the First World War, 61 had been located.

The great American lawyer and patron of work in the valley, Theodore Davis, was responsible for many of the more recent of these discoveries, but in 1914, after a couple of disappointing seasons, he declared the valley to be “exhausted”. Carter, however, thought otherwise, believing there to be tombs still left undiscovered, including that of Tutankhamun. Under the patronage of the 5th Earl of Carnarvon, in 1917 he began excavations in the valley. After a few unproductive seasons, and with Carnarvon’s patience very nearly exhausted, he made the greatest discovery of them all.

Though he does not appear in any contemporary king-lists, scholars were aware of Tutankhamun prior to Carter’s master-stroke, and that he had reigned at least into a ninth year. He was believed, correctly, to have been a king of the Amarna period (during which the pharaohs’ residence was sited in the city of Amarna). He was also noted for his role in reintroducing the worship of the god Amun, following the reign of his predecessor (and probable father), Akhenaten, who had abandoned traditional Egyptian polytheism and introduced worship centred on the god Aten. This much is revealed by the fact that at some point Tut changed his name from Tutankhaten to Tutankhamun.

A scattering of decorated blocks bearing Tutankhamun’s inscriptions showed that he had been a builder, but otherwise he remained shrouded in mystery. Though the contents of his tomb were astonishing, they did not lead to any great leaps forward in what we know about the king or his times. This led Carter to lament that “what he was and what he did we are still sadly to seek”.

The one element of the discovery that had the potential to tell us most about the life and death of

the king was his mummified body. Tutankhamun’s remains have been studied at first hand on four occasions. First, on 11 November 1925, the body was examined by Carter and a team of forensic experts led by Douglas Derry, an anatomist at the Government School of Medicine in Cairo.

In 1968 a team from Liverpool University, headed by Ronald Harrison, produced a series of x-ray images of the mummy that enabled Egyptologists to carry out a more detailed study than had previously been possible. Then, in 1978, Dr James Harris conducted a closer examination of the skull and teeth with the help of new x-ray technology. Finally, in 2005, a team led by Dr Zahi Hawass performed a computed tomography (CT) scan of the mummy and, in doing so, generated the most detailed images of the body yet produced.

Collectively, these studies established that Tutankhamun died between the ages of 17 and 19, more or less as Carter and Derry had concluded, and was between 1.6 and 1.7 metres (5ft 2in and 5ft 6in) tall. Beyond this, however, very little is certain.

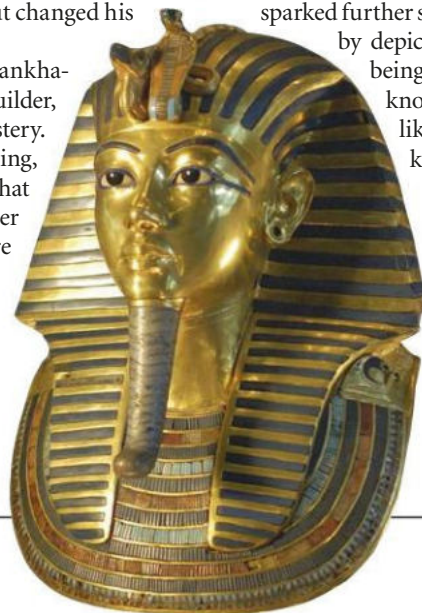
There has been a great deal of speculation about the various medical conditions that may have afflicted Tutankhamun during his lifetime, and to what extent these contributed to his death. Possibilities suggested over the years include general physical weakness, perhaps caused by inbreeding within the royal family (which almost certainly did occur); *pectus carinatum*, or pigeon chest; and even ‘Tutankhamun syndrome’, with symptoms such as breast development, sagging abdominal wall and flat feet.

Secondary evidence, such as the presence of walking sticks in the tomb and Tutankhamun’s representation in the art of the times, has sparked further speculation. The debate has also been influenced

by depictions of Akhenaten, who was often shown as being a grotesque, almost deformed figure. Yet no one knows whether this was an attempt to capture the likeness of a king genuinely suffering from some kind of illness or merely an artistic convention.

Foremost among the theories on Tutankhamun’s death – at least in terms of the amount of attention it has gathered – is the idea that he may have been the victim of foul play.

During the 1968 investigation, Harrison observed a small piece of bone inside, and



**Tutankhamun’s solid-gold death mask has helped make the king one of the most instantly recognisable figures in history**



## THE HISTORY ESSAY

“CT scans from 2005 revealed that Tutankhamun had suffered a fracture to the left femur, and it appears that this occurred during the last few days of his life”



**A cartouche of the king when his name was Tutankhaten, ‘the living image of Aten’. He later reintroduced worship of the god Amun and changed his name to the now-familiar Tutankhamun**

apparently detached from, the skull. This led him to suggest that the king may have suffered a blow to the head, and others to conclude that this was evidence that the boy king had been murdered.

In light of further scrutiny of Harrison’s x-rays and the 2005 CT scan data, most experts now agree that the detached bone was the result of a postmortem, and nothing whatsoever to do with the king’s demise. Yet this still hasn’t prevented the theory that he was murdered from taking hold.

Dr Hawass’s investigations in 2005 led to a new theory gaining traction. The CT scans revealed that the king had suffered a fracture to the left femur. Perhaps more important was the observation that an amount of embalming fluid had entered the break. This suggested that the wound that caused it was still open at the time of death, and also that there were no signs that it had started to heal.

On this basis, the fracture probably occurred in the last few days of the king’s life. While this alone could not have killed the king, Hawass’s team has suggested that the wound may have become infected, and that it was this that finally finished off

Tutankhamun. Yet even this has failed to persuade everyone. In a recent book on the subject, Hawass notes that his theory was not backed by every member of the team.

At this point, it’s worth emphasising just how unusual Tutankhamun’s mummy is. It displays a series of highly unusual features, particularly around the torso, where a number of the ribs and a section of the left pelvis are completely missing. The embalming incision through which certain internal organs would have been removed – as was standard – is in the wrong place and considerably larger than normal; much of the soft tissue inside the chest cavity was removed and replaced with rolls of linen; and the arms were crossed in an unusually low position. Finally, the heart, which would not normally have been removed and which was crucial for the survival of the individual into the afterlife, was missing.

It was clear that if these anomalies were the result of some kind of injury they might well provide vital clues to the cause of death.

One question still to be answered is this: to what extent might these injuries have been caused by Carter and his team when they removed the mummy from its nest of coffins? Carter’s notes on the process, which are freely accessible online thanks to the magnificent efforts of our colleagues at the Griffith Institute in Oxford, are full of references to the difficulties in separating each of Tutankhamun’s three coffins, first of all from the sarcophagus and subsequently from one another. (The two smaller coffins sat snugly inside the largest one in a ‘Russian doll’ arrangement.)

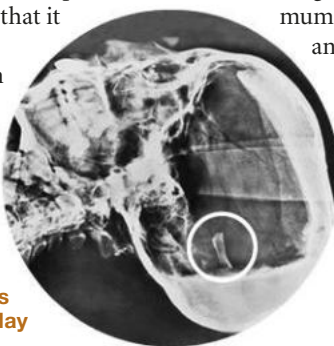
The mummy itself was a very tight fit for the innermost coffin, and was stuck fast to the inside by a layer of the embalming oil that had been poured over the king’s body. The team tried various methods to loosen it, and even left it out in the sun in the vain hope that the heat would help to melt the oils. Derry’s autopsy had, in the end, to be carried out while the mummy was still in the coffin and with the death mask still in place.

Tutankhamun’s body was adorned with jewels and other precious paraphernalia, much of which the team had difficulty in removing. At the time the body was reinterred in the tomb, having finally been unwrapped and laid on a sand bed, the king was still wearing a skull-cap and a beaded necklace. By the time of Harrison’s examination in 1968, both were missing. Harrison’s x-rays showed clearly the damage to the thorax and missing ribs, but Derry had not observed that damage. This has led some to suggest that at some point the mummy was illicitly disturbed in order that the skull cap

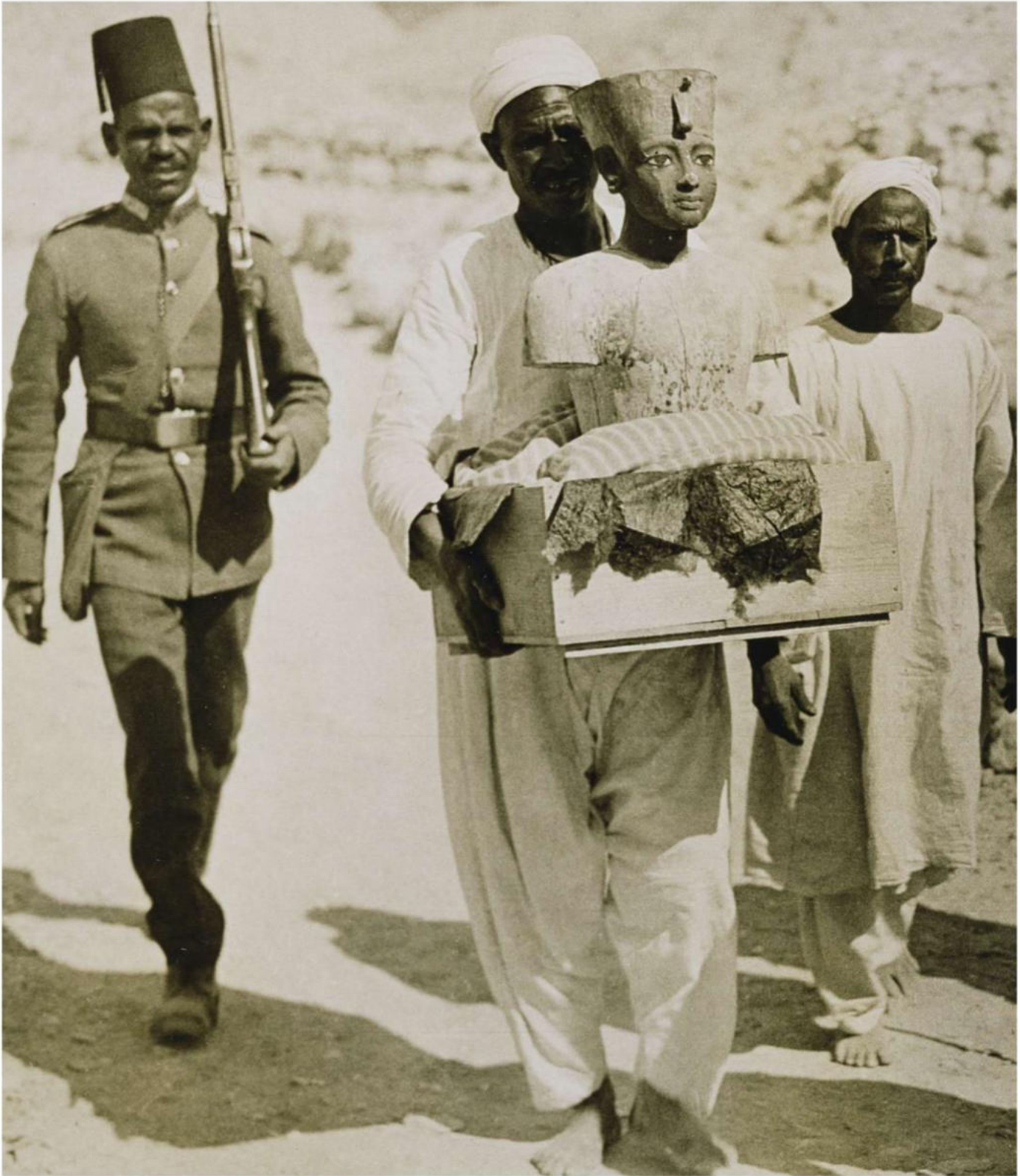
and necklace could be stolen, and that the robbers removed a section of the human remains, including the missing ribs, in order to free the booty.

However, it is perfectly possible that Derry was unaware that the ribs were missing because he did not have the benefit of x-rays. What’s more, there is

**The first x-ray of Tut – showing a piece of bone (circled) detached from the skull – sparked speculation that his death was the result of foul play**







King Tut's bust is carried from his tomb in the Valley of the Kings after the initial discovery of the tomb in 1922. Egyptologists are still trying to establish how much damage Howard Carter's team did to the body when they removed it from its innermost coffin



“One Egyptologist suggests that the king’s torso was damaged in a massive accident, which forced the embalmers to remove the ribs, heart and perhaps other parts of the soft tissue”

evidence that they were removed in ancient times: though some of the ribs were broken, others were cut smoothly, and the linen packing beneath them was undisturbed. Egyptologist W Benson Harer argues that the direction of the cuts suggest that they could only have been made prior to the body being packed, and also that the bones must have been fresh when this took place, because older bone cannot be cut so cleanly.

Harer also suggests that the king’s torso was damaged in a massive accident, which forced the embalmers to remove the ribs, heart and perhaps other parts of the soft tissue to give the body a superficially normal appearance in preparation for mummification. This is persuasive. But what kind of accident could have brought this about?

While filming a 2013 Channel 4 documentary examining the death and burial of Tutankhamun, we ascertained that the damage to the mummy seemed to be concentrated around the left-hand side of the torso, from the clavicle downwards as far as the pelvis: it seemed that a tall, blunt object had struck the king with great force.

No weaponry we knew of could have caused such an injury. However, we felt that another theory was worth investigating again: the possibility that Tutankhamun died in a chariot accident, and that, more specifically, the fatal impact was caused by a chariot wheel.

A team from Advanced Simtech – a company that, among other things, provides computer-generated simulations of car crashes for

the UK courts – used a replica New Kingdom chariot to model the manoeuvrability and maximum speed that could be achieved using one of these vehicles. (Several chariots were found in Tutankhamun’s tomb, and were a common feature of the iconography of kingship during the New Kingdom.)

This information, and what is known of the king’s height and likely weight, was then used to test a series of accident scenarios to establish whether any could have produced the injuries sustained by Tutankhamun. Given the forces involved, it was not difficult to create a situation that would have led to serious injury, but in almost all cases the most serious injury sustained would have been to the head and neck; as we have seen, the mummy presents no clear evidence of any such trauma. However, one scenario did appear to result in precisely the injuries we had observed in the mummy.

Had the king been kneeling or crouching down and struck by the wheel of the chariot, he would undoubtedly have suffered massive injuries to his torso. Crucially, though the head would have been thrown violently forward on impact, it would have been pulled away at the last moment before striking the wheel. The victim would undoubtedly have suffered from whiplash – but by this point that would hardly have mattered.

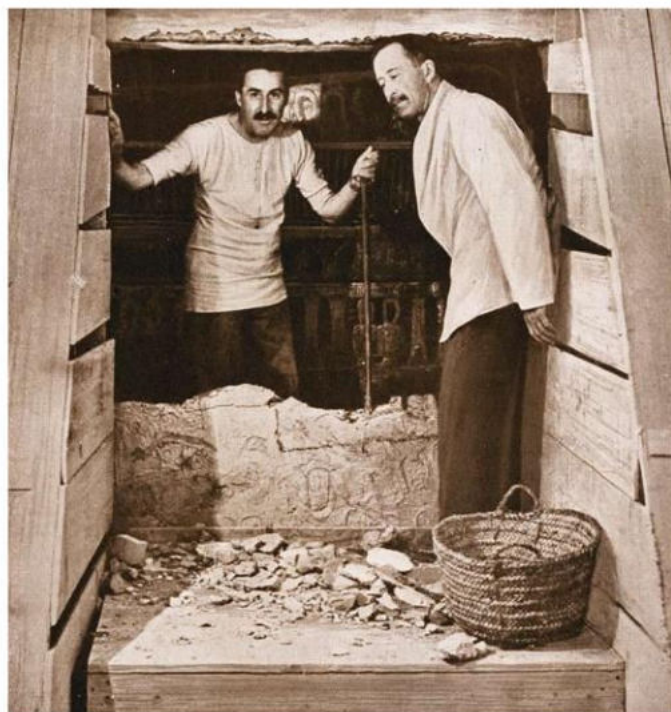
A team from Cranfield University was called upon to help ascertain whether the injuries sustained in such an accident would have been enough to cause the king’s death. To do this, we needed to know what the effect of a chariot wheel impacting the human rib cage at high velocity would be.

The team modelled the forces involved and conducted a test using the rib cage and flesh of a pig procured from a local butcher. Unsurprisingly, the test showed that the impact would puncture the ribs and that the wheel would have penetrated the soft tissue underneath by at least an inch or two – enough to cause massive internal damage. In modern times, had paramedics been on hand quickly enough, there is a chance that the victim of such an accident could survive. In New Kingdom Egypt this would not have been the case.

We can only speculate as to how the king might have come to be in such a position. He may have fallen out of his own chariot and been picking himself up when another came careering into him from behind. Or could he have been killed in battle?

It had long been thought that Tutankhamun had never been actively engaged in war – there was no clear evidence for it. But that has now changed. Dr Raymond Johnson of the University of Chicago has spent many years studying the decorated blocks scattered throughout the temple complexes at Karnak and Luxor, which represent the remains of now-dismantled temples. Many of these appear to have come from monuments erected by Tutankhamun and, after years of painstaking work piecing together these vast jigsaw puzzles,

CORBIS



Howard Carter (left) and his patron, Lord Carnarvon, pictured as they were about to enter the tomb



“Tutankhamun may have fallen out of his own chariot  
and been picking himself up when another came  
careering into him from behind”



The gods Anubis (left) and Hathor (shown in part, far right) flank Tutankhamun on the southern wall of the king's burial chamber. They are holding ankhs, symbolising the pharaoh's eternal life in the afterworld

Dr Johnson has concluded that the young king may well have been actively engaged in battle.

Several scenes that have emerged apparently show a military campaign in Nubia. Another shows Tutankhamun in a chariot leading the Egyptian forces against a Syrian-style citadel. This strengthens the possibility that Tutankhamun may have been injured in a chariot accident on the battlefield.

We cannot know for certain that this is what happened, but it is as credible as any other hypothesis put forward so far, and provides an explanation for the mummy's most puzzling anomalies.

We have no idea, in fact, how the vast majority of Egyptian kings died – but it's perhaps worth noting also that, in most other cases, few people have cared enough to ask the question. Tutankhamun, by

contrast, continues to fascinate us. In terms of his life and achievements, the king remains almost as obscure as he was before his tomb was revealed. Yet its contents, including the remains of the man himself, have – more than 3,000 years after his demise – made him one of the most famous individuals ever to have lived.

Like all ancient Egyptians, Tutankhamun would have wished for that very Egyptian immortality encapsulated in the phrase 'to cause his name to live'. Whatever his Earthly achievements, whatever the circumstances of his life and death, he has perhaps been more successful in this than anyone else from that great civilisation. **H**

**Dr Chris Naunton** is an Egyptologist and director of the Egypt Exploration Society





A fragment of a statue of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut. She has often been cast as exceptional in ruling in her own right, yet at least seven women wielded supreme power in ancient Egypt

# THE **FEMALE** **'KINGS'** OF ANCIENT EGYPT

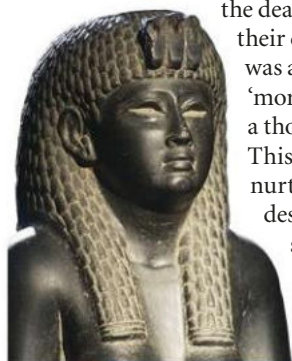
Cleopatra the Great has become virtually synonymous with the term 'female pharaoh'. Yet, as **Joann Fletcher** reveals, Mark Antony's famous wife was merely the last woman ruler in a legacy spanning three millennia



According to the ancient Egyptians, the entire universe was made up of masculine and feminine elements, maintained in a state of perfect balance by the goddess Maat. Her numerous fellow deities included a male earth god and female sky goddess. While the green-hued Geb lay back, his star-spangled sister Nut stretched herself high above to form the expanse of sky, hold back the forces of chaos and give birth to the sun each dawn.

Nut was the mother of twin deities Isis and Osiris. Isis was the active partner to her passive brother Osiris, whom she raised from

the dead to conceive their child, Horus. Isis was also regarded as 'more powerful than a thousand soldiers'. This same blend of nurturer and destroyer was shared with Hathor, goddess of love and



beauty, who was capable of transforming into Sekhmet – a deity so fierce that male pharaohs were said to 'rage like a Sekhmet' against enemies in battle.

Such mixing of the sexes was not confined to myth. Indeed, Egypt's women were portrayed alongside men at every level of society. This no doubt explains why the Greek historian Herodotus, when visiting Egypt around 450 BC, came to the conclusion that the Egyptians "have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind".

So though the most common female title in Egypt's 3,000-year history was 'lady of the house' (housewife), many women worked in the temple hierarchy. Others were overseers and administrators, or held titles ranging from doctor, guard and judge to treasurer, vizier (prime minister) and viceroy.

Some women were also monarchs – from the regents who ruled on behalf of underage sons to those who governed in their own right as pharaoh, a term that simply meant 'the one from the palace'. Yet some Egyptologists still downgrade female rulers by defining them by the relatively modern term 'queen', which can simply refer to a woman married to a male

king. And though the c15th-century BC Hatshepsut ruled as a pharaoh in her own right, she is still often regarded as the exception that proves the rule – despite the fact that the evidence suggests there were at the very least seven female pharaohs, including Nefertiti and the great Cleopatra.

These well-known names were following a trail blazed by female predecessors dating back to the beginning of Egypt's written history. The first such ruler was Merneith, whose reign is dated to around 2970 BC. When her tomb was discovered at Abydos in 1900, it was claimed that "it can hardly be doubted that Merneith was a king" – until the realisation that 'he' was a 'she' saw her status switched to 'queen'. Nonetheless, her name appeared on a list of Egypt's earliest kings, discovered in 1986.

The evidence for female rulers is as fragmentary as it is for many male counterparts, with few known dates of birth or death, and no known portraits of many. Yet only the women's titles are routinely downgraded or dismissed, even when the evidence reveals that some, such as those profiled on these pages, did rule Egypt as pharaoh.

ABOVE: This statue is thought to depict Cleopatra, the last in a long line of 'female kings'  
THIS IMAGE: The coffin of the temple official Pakherenkhnosu shows Amentet, goddess of the west, who protected dead souls





## Sobeknefru: The crocodile queen

**Title:** King of Upper and Lower Egypt  
**Born:** c1830–1815 BC, possibly at Hawara in Fayum oasis south of Cairo  
**Died:** c1785 BC

Despite evidence that some women wielded kingly powers during the third millennium BC, the first universally accepted female pharaoh is Sobeknefru. Daughter of Amenemhat III, whom she succeeded in c1789 BC to rule for about four years, Sobeknefru appeared on official king lists for centuries after her death.

The first monarch named after crocodile god Sobek, symbol of pharaonic might, Sobeknefru took the standard five royal names of a king – Merytre Satskhem-nebettawy Djedetkha Sobekkare Sobeknefru – with the epithet Son of Ra (the sun god) amended to Daughter of Ra. Her portraits blended male and female attributes, with the striped royal headcloth and male-style kilt worn over female dress.

Sobeknefru is also depicted in the cloak associated with her coronation. And in a more complete portrait identified as

Sobeknefru in 1993, the strong family resemblance to her father, Amenemhat III, can be seen.

Sobeknefru created temples at the northern sites Tell Dab'a and Herakleopolis, and also completed her father's pyramid complex at Hawara. She seems to have built her own pyramid at Mazghuna near Dahshur, but no trace of her burial has been found. If she is mentioned at all in modern histories, it is only to be dismissed as the last resort of an otherwise male dynasty. Yet the throne passed smoothly to a succession of male kings who followed her lead by naming themselves after the crocodile god.

Her innovations inspired the next female pharaoh, Hatshepsut (ruled c1479–1458 BC), who adopted the same kingly regalia and false beard. The modern tendency to cast Hatshepsut as a cross-dresser is a result of the persistent playing down or ignoring of her female forerunners. Such is the case with Nefertiti (pictured right). She is judged almost entirely on her beautiful bust, yet evidence suggests that she wielded the same kingly powers as her husband and may have succeeded him as sole ruler.

Her example was followed by the 12th-century BC female pharaoh Tawosret, whose titles included Strong Bull and Daughter of Ra. She was the last female pharaoh for almost 1,000 years, the final millennium BC being marked by successive foreign invasions of Egypt. The most successful of these were the Macedonian Ptolemies, claiming descent from Alexander the Great and ruling for the last three centuries BC. Manetho, an Egyptian advisor to the Ptolemies, created the system of royal dynasties we still use today. He named five of the female pharaohs, stating that as early as the second dynasty, in the early third millennium BC, "it was decided that women might hold the kingly office".



## Khentkawes I: The mother of Egypt

**Title:** Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, [holding office as] King of Upper and Lower Egypt  
**Born:** c2550–2520 BC, possibly at the royal capital, Memphis  
**Died:** c2510–2490 BC

One woman whose status has long been debated is Khentkawes I. She was the daughter of King Menkaure, the wife of King Shepseskaf (ruled c2510–2502 BC), and bore at least two further kings – with new evidence supporting the possibility that she herself also ruled Egypt.

Khentkawes I's funerary complex was as elaborate as the nearby pyramids of her male predecessors – so elaborate, in fact, that her tomb has been dubbed the Fourth Pyramid of Giza. It had its own funerary temple, a causeway and, says Ana Tavares, joint field director of the excavations at her Giza tomb site, "quite exceptionally, a valley temple and a basin/harbour, which suggests that she reigned as a pharaoh at the end of the Fourth Dynasty".

In fact, Khentkawes I's kingly status was suggested as early as 1933 by Egyptian archaeologist Selim Hassan during his initial excavation of her tomb. Here she was portrayed enthroned, holding a

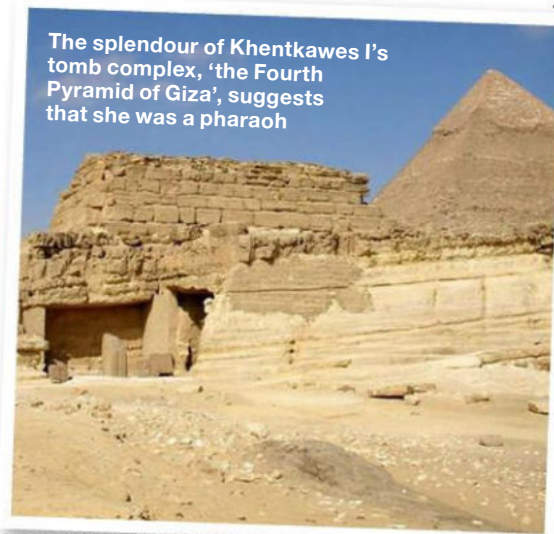
sceptre and wearing both the royal 'uraeus' cobra at her brow and the tie-on false beard of kingship combined with her traditional female dress.

The tomb also revealed Khentkawes I's official titles in a hieroglyphic inscription. This was initially translated as 'King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt' – until British Egyptologist Alan Gardiner found a "philologically tenable" alternative translation meaning that Khentkawes I had been only 'the mother of two kings' rather than a king herself. Yet in light of new archaeological evidence, her ambiguous title is now interpreted as 'Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, [holding office as] King of Upper and Lower Egypt'.

Khentkawes I certainly left her mark at Giza, where memories that a female ruler had built a great tomb persisted for two millennia. Yet she was by no means unique, for within a couple of decades her descendant Khentkawes II held the same titles, was again portrayed with the royal cobra at her brow, and had her own pyramid built at the new royal cemetery, Abusir (near Sakkara, south of modern Cairo).

There was a third such woman whose pyramid complex at Sakkara was so large that some Egyptologists have suggested she had 'an independent reign' at the death of her husband, King Djedkare, in c2375 BC. But this mystery ruler remains anonymous and forgotten; not only was her name erased from her tomb complex after her death, the 1950s excavation of her tomb was never published – so it remains the Pyramid of the Unknown Queen.

The splendour of Khentkawes I's tomb complex, 'the Fourth Pyramid of Giza', suggests that she was a pharaoh





# Arsinoe II: The queen and female king

**Titles:** Queen of Macedonia (& Thrace), King of Upper and Lower Egypt  
**Born:** c316 BC, most likely at Memphis  
**Died:** probably 16 or 17 July 268 BC

The legacy of Egypt's female pharaohs certainly inspired Arsinoe II. Having been married to two successive kings of Macedonia, she returned to her Egyptian homeland and the court of her younger brother Ptolemy II, marrying him to become queen for a third time. She also became his full co-ruler, with the same combination of names as a traditional pharaoh.

Though these titles were long assumed to have been awarded posthumously, recent research has revealed that Arsinoe II was acknowledged as King of Upper and Lower Egypt during her own lifetime. Like Hatshepsut over 1,000 years earlier, Arsinoe became Daughter of Ra and adopted the same distinctive regalia to demonstrate continuity with past practice. Further exploiting Egyptian tradition, Arsinoe was likened to the goddess Isis, twinned with her laid-back brother-husband Osiris. As married siblings, Arsinoe and Ptolemy were, for the benefit of their Greek subjects, equated with classical deities Zeus and Hera.

Joint portraits of Arsinoe and Ptolemy highlighted the family resemblance to their

putative uncle Alexander whose mummified body, entombed in their royal capital, Alexandria, provided further evidence of their divinely inspired dynasty.

This, too, was a relationship Arsinoe exploited to the full, from her subtle adoption of Alexander's trademark ram's horns to staring eyes so large some medical historians claim she must have suffered from exophthalmic goitre, a disease that often affects the thyroid.

Arsinoe II certainly used her multi-faceted public image to great effect in her political dealings, when she and Ptolemy II became the first of Alexander's successors to make official contact with Rome in 273 BC.

Then, when Egypt joined Athens and Sparta to fight against Macedonia in the Chremonidean War, Arsinoe's lead role was acknowledged in an Athenian decree stating that Ptolemy II was "following the policies of his ancestors and his sister". Athens also honoured the couple with statuary, as did Olympia, where Arsinoe achieved great success in the Olympic Games of 272 BC – her teams won victories in all three chariot races on a single day.

Most of Arsinoe's images were seen in Egypt where, according to inscriptions in the temple at Mendes, it was decreed that "her statue be set up in all the temples. This pleased their priests for they were aware of her noble attitude toward the gods and of her excellent deeds to the benefit of all people."

In Egypt's new capital, Alexandria, Arsinoe's influence was even stronger.

Continuing Ptolemaic tradition by spending vast sums on the Great Library and Museum, she personally financed spectacular public festivals with which to impress her subjects – though fragments of a lost biography reveal her sneering at the "very dirty get-together" of the crowds as they celebrated in the streets beyond her lavish palace.

## Dazzling legacy

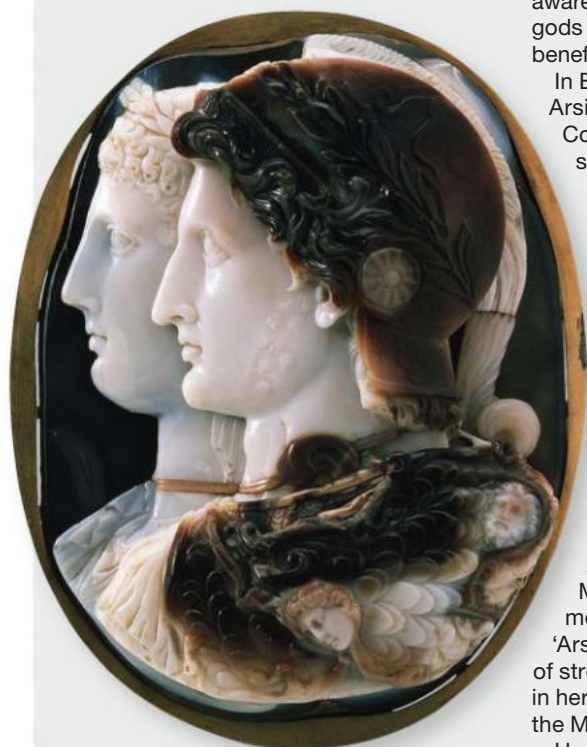
Having transformed the Ptolemaic house into a dazzling bastion of conspicuous consumption, 48-year-old Arsinoe died in July 268 BC and was cremated in a Macedonian-style ceremony. Her memory was kept alive at the annual 'Arsinoeia' festival, and in the renaming of streets, towns, cities and entire regions in her honour, both in Egypt and around the Mediterranean.

Her spiritual presence was so strong that for the next 22 years of Ptolemy II's reign, he remained unmarried and continued to

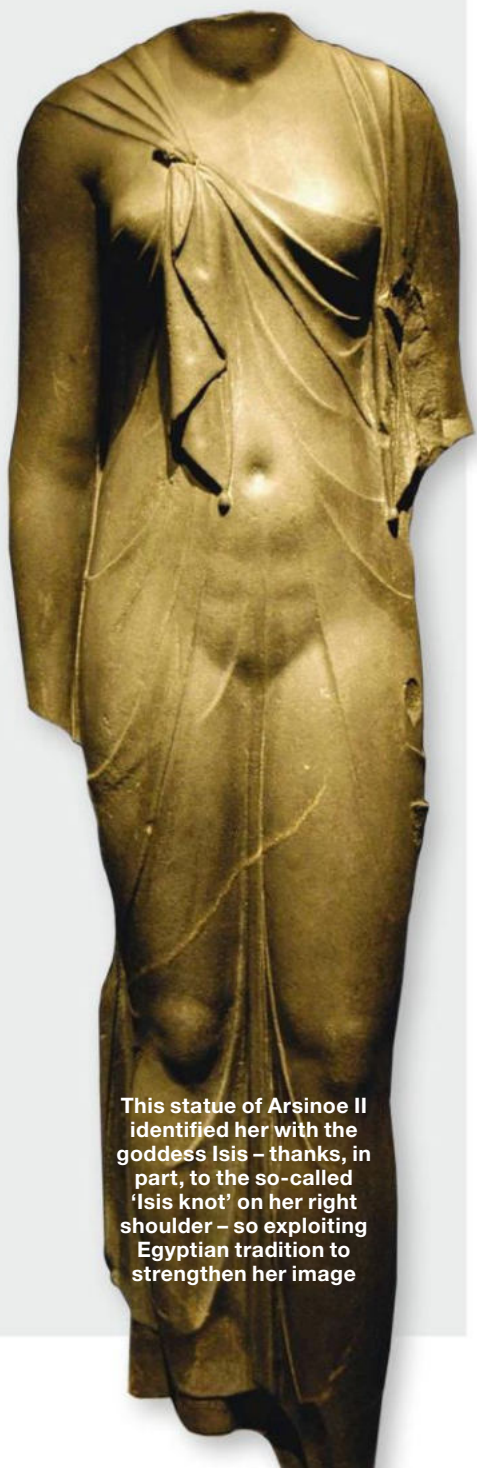
appear with his deceased wife in official portraits, naming her on official documents and issuing her coinage.

The first Ptolemaic woman to rule as a female king, Arsinoe's achievements were then replicated by the women of her dynasty, the last of whom was Cleopatra the Great – the final, and of course most famous, culmination of a three-millennia heritage of female pharaohs of Egypt. **H**

Professor Joann Fletcher is based in the department of archaeology at the University of York. She presented the BBC Two documentaries *Egypt's Lost Queens* and *Ancient Egypt: Life and Death in the Valley of the Kings*



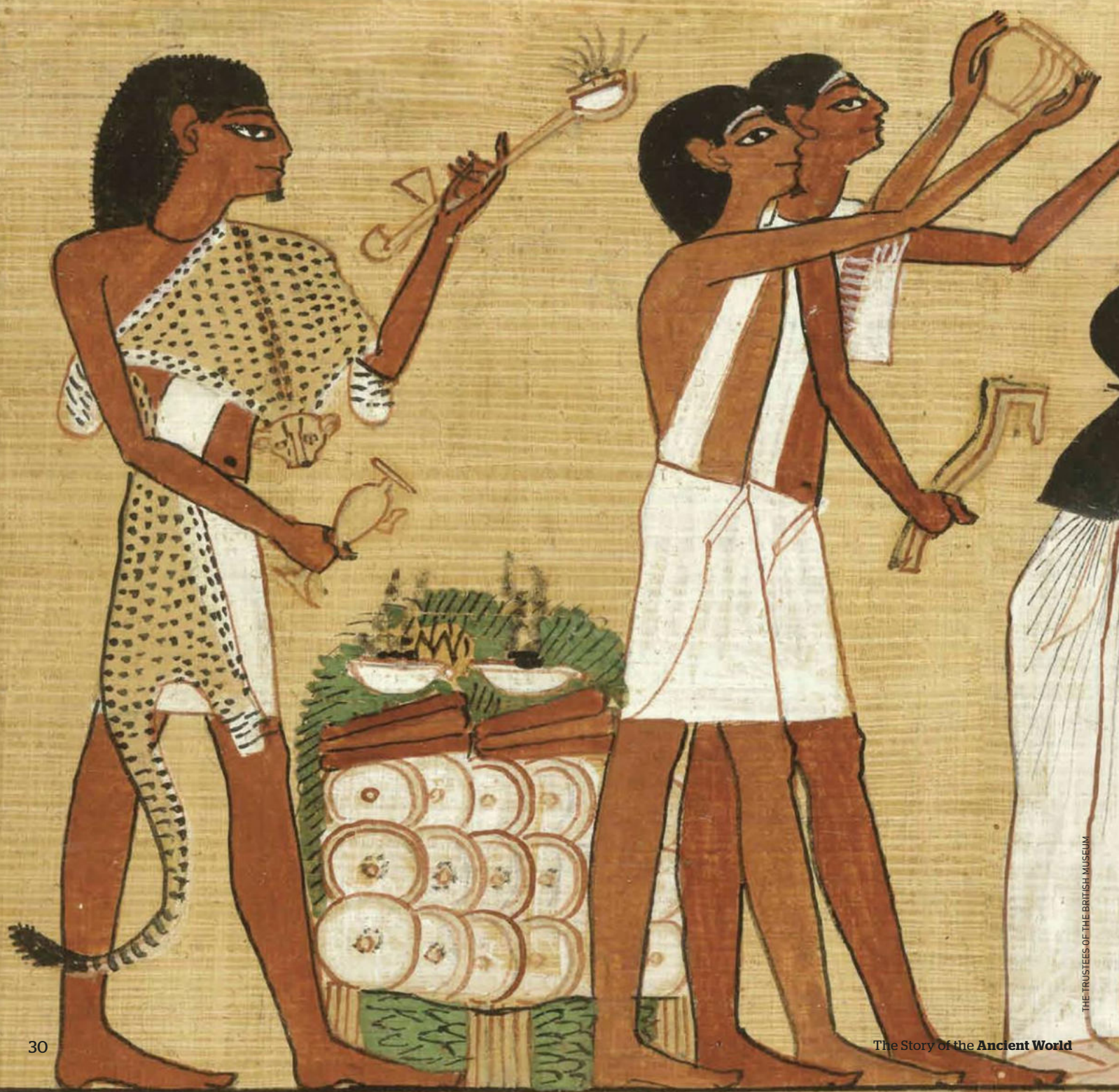
The Gonzaga Cameo, thought to show Ptolemy and Arsinoe, the first Ptolemaic woman credited with ruling Egypt as a 'female king'



This statue of Arsinoe II identified her with the goddess Isis – thanks, in part, to the so-called 'Isis knot' on her right shoulder – so exploiting Egyptian tradition to strengthen her image



# GUIDEBOOK TO THE AFTERLIFE





In ancient Egypt, the end of life marked the start of a challenging journey - one that could be smoothed using the spells compiled in a Book of the Dead. **Rob Attar** explores how these books were used to ensure a speedy and successful path through the next world



A c1285 BC Book of the Dead illustration shows a mummy being prepared for burial while his family laments



Wearing clean clothes and white sandals, you stand in a long hall supported by columns. On a throne at the far end of the room

you see the figure of Osiris, the god of the underworld. You are surrounded by 42 gods, terrifying mummified figures including the Swallower of shades, the Bone-breaker and the Eater of entrails.

In front of you is the god Thoth in the form of a baboon. He sits atop a pair of scales that will very shortly decide your eternal fate. This is judgment day and, should you fail the test, you will experience the agonising second death. But you show no fear because you are a possessor of the Book of the Dead – a tome that contains within its texts the secrets to surviving the afterlife.

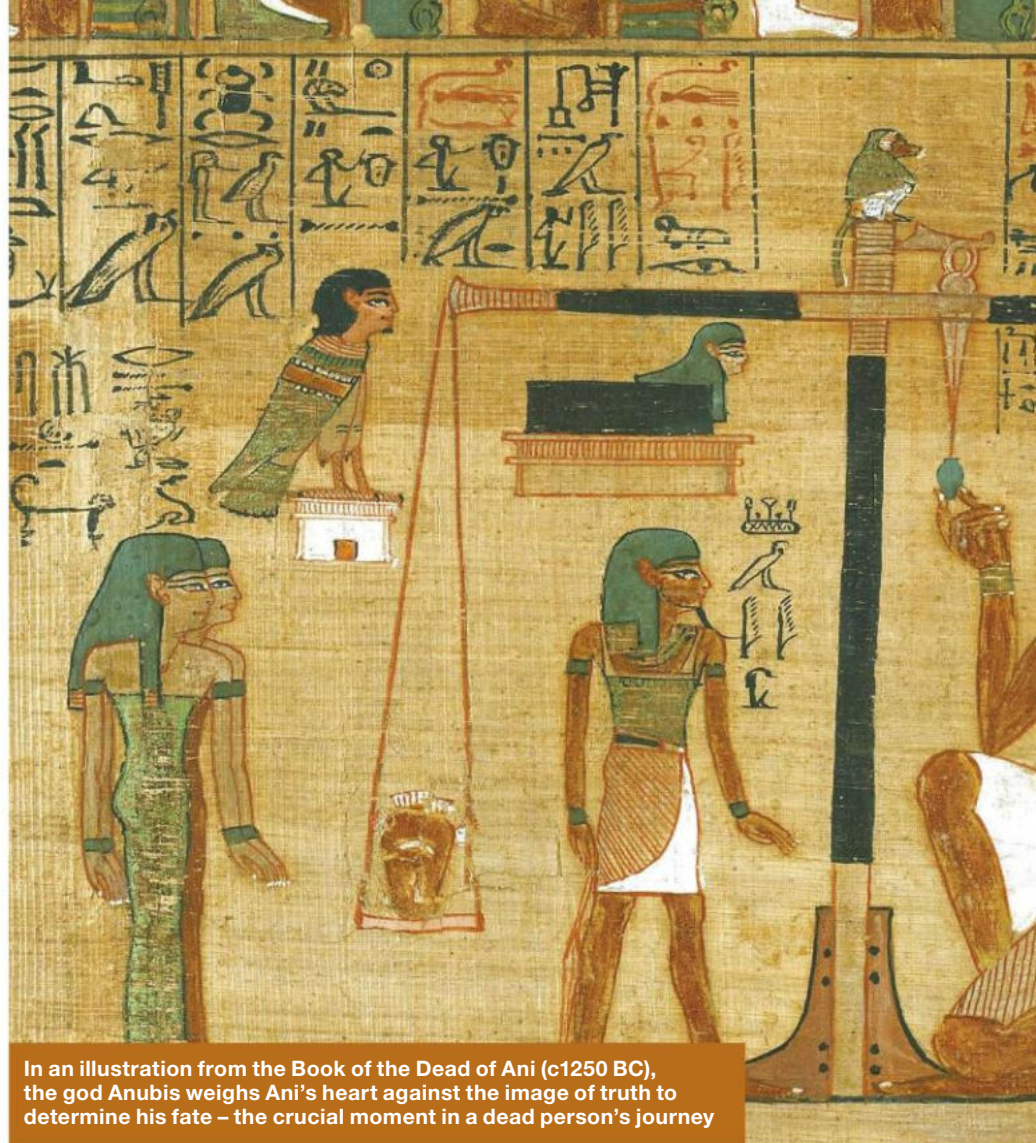
You turn to the first of the gods and begin to speak: “O Far-strider who came forth from Heliopolis, I have done no falsehood.” Then you turn to the second: “O Fire-embracer who came forth from Kheraha, I have not robbed...”

## Coming forth by day

For ancient Egyptians, life on earth could be very short, so the rituals surrounding death were an integral part of their culture. Many of the best-known relics from Egypt – pyramids, tombs and mummies – reveal the time and resources that the people of the Nile were prepared to spend to ensure a successful afterlife. Spells or formulae that could aid your path through the next world first appeared on the walls of pyramids during the Egyptian Fifth Dynasty, around 2350 BC. Some 400 years later, in the time of Egypt’s Middle Kingdom, these Pyramid Texts evolved into Coffin Texts that were inscribed on coffins, tomb walls and, sometimes, sheets of papyrus.

It was after 1550 BC that a corpus of spells written and illustrated on sheets of papyrus started to replace Coffin Texts in Egyptian tombs. This is what we now know as the Book of the Dead, though the Egyptians themselves referred to it as the book of “coming forth by day”. The Book of the Dead continued to be used, albeit with evolutions, for the next 1,500 years until great changes in the country undermined many of Egypt’s traditions.

Although we know it as *the* Book of the Dead, in fact no two books were made the same. “There wasn’t a standard Book of the Dead – every manuscript contained different texts,” explains John H Taylor, expert on the funerary archaeology of ancient Egypt at the British Museum. “There was a pool of texts [around 200] from which you could choose, but no known manuscript contains every known spell. There are some that occur in



In an illustration from the Book of the Dead of Ani (c1250 BC), the god Anubis weighs Ani's heart against the image of truth to determine his fate – the crucial moment in a dead person's journey

pretty much every copy of the Book of the Dead and others that are really rare, of which we have only one or two examples.”

The Book of the Dead was widely used, and indeed thousands of examples have survived to the present day. Yet it is clear that such books were not available to all Egyptians. Carefully written and often beautifully illustrated, Books of the Dead would have been beyond the resources of the majority of people. They are only found in the tombs of the upper echelons of Egyptian society. Were they, therefore, not essential? “The Book of the Dead didn’t seem to be something you absolutely had to have,” says Professor Stephen Quirke of the Petrie Museum, University College London. “It was an additional luxury to shore up and reinforce the chance to get eternal life. It was a very dominant, desirable addition to a rich burial.”

After you died, Egyptians believed, your *ba* (spirit) would depart your body – but only temporarily. The *ba* would need to return to your remains periodically, perhaps every night, and for this reunion to be successful the body had to be intact. That’s why Egyptians developed a complex process of mummification – because without it your afterlife would be jeopardised.

Halting decomposition was, however, not enough to guarantee that you would prevail in the next world. Your *ba* would itself face several challenges on its journey – and a Book of the Dead would be an invaluable aid in dealing with these. So the book was often placed in the coffin, sometimes even wrapped up within the bandages of the mummy, ensuring that the words inside would follow you as you encountered the perils of life after death.

There is no doubt that the next world was a dangerous place, haunted by monsters that echoed and exaggerated the wild beasts Egyptians might have encountered in the world of the living. You were, therefore, equipped with spells for fighting off serpents, crocodiles, beetles, snakes and a frightening being known as “the creature that swallows the ass”. You might also encounter some unpleasant henchmen of Osiris, “sharp of fingers”, and the so-called “slaughter place” of the god.

Thankfully, you were provided with the means of fighting off evil, escaping traps, and avoiding decomposition and decapitation. Another scary prospect was being turned upside down, a fate that would play havoc with your digestive system. For





“A spell was included in some Books of the Dead ‘for **not eating excrement or drinking urine** in the underworld’”

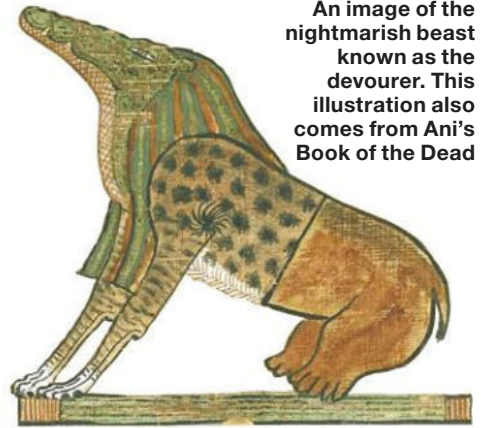
your life on earth would be judged. After answering the questions of the 42 mummified gods in the hall, you would approach the set of scales presided over by the jackal-headed god Anubis. On one scale was the image of truth and on the other your own heart. If you had behaved well in your life then the scales would balance and a rosy future would await you. But if the scales failed to balance, your next appointment would be with the devourer, a nightmarish beast with the head of a crocodile, the body of a lion and the haunches of a hippo. The devourer would consume your heart; you would die the second death and be gone for ever.

This was far from an appealing prospect – but, thankfully, the Book of the Dead offered a solution in the form of spell 30B: “O my heart of my mother! O my heart of my different forms! Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance.”

As John H Taylor explains: “Even if you had lived a bad life you could get away with it by using this spell, which prevents your heart from spilling the beans to the gods. This was the first time in history when you see the idea that your fate after death was dependent on your behaviour when you were alive. However, it was not carried through to its logical conclusion – because you could cheat your way around that particularly tricky moment.”

Once you had navigated your way through these difficult situations, where exactly would you want to end up? “There is no single goal in the Book of the Dead,” explains John H Taylor. “It is a collection of texts that contains spells and texts from different periods and different localities in Egypt. They’re all a bit contradictory so there are actually several different possible end points you could reach on your journey.”

One possible destiny would be to sail across the sky every day with the sun god Ra in his boat. A second option would be to live in the underworld with its resident god, Osiris. But the place that you would most like to visit was



An image of the nightmarish beast known as the devourer. This illustration also comes from Ani's Book of the Dead

the Field of Reeds, an idealised version of Egypt in which you could continue many of your earthly activities. Ploughing, reaping, eating, drinking and copulating are all explicitly mentioned in Book of the Dead descriptions of this tempting place.

The Field of Reeds was undoubtedly somewhere with strong agricultural connections, a theme that Stephen Quirke believes recurred throughout Egyptian ideas of death. “Egypt was an urban society but farming was still the mainstay of the country,” Quirke says. “Part of the way that death was illustrated was through the agricultural cycle. You locked into the sun, which was the dominant source of light, energy and warmth. It dictated the agricultural year, which was central to this farming economy. You also locked into the earth, where the idea that you went to the ground to die and could be resurrected was linked with the notion of agricultural and plant regrowth. These are very organic ways of looking at life.

“Then there is the Field of Reeds,” Quirke continues, “which, in the way I read it, is more like a marsh. If you think of the Nile flooding often, then farming would often be a marshy experience. One of the most famous illustrations from the Book of the Dead is a scene of the Field of Reeds where dead people are happily reaping corn at miraculous heights”.

Sometimes, though, all this sowing and reaping might seem a bit too much like hard work. For this reason the Book of the Dead provided you with a useful solution. You would often be buried with a small figurine known as a *shabti* to whom you would delegate labours in the next life. Spell 6 requested that the *shabti* would take your place when you were tasked with “making arable the fields”, “flooding the banks” or “conveying sand from east to west”. With this little helper busily doing the work that might have inconvenienced your afterlife, you would be free to enjoy your eternal paradise. ■

Rob Attar is editor of *BBC History Magazine*

this reason a spell was included in some Books of the Dead “for not eating excrement or drinking urine in the underworld” – a vivid description of some of the horrors that might befall you.

### Fearsome deities

Your *ba* would have to pass through a series of gates, each of them guarded by a fearsome deity. Your knowledge of the gates and guards was crucial to your advancement, and this information was helpfully contained within the Book of the Dead.

So, for example, when you approached the sixth gate, spell 146 advised you to declaim: “Make a way for me, for I know you, I know your name, and I know the name of the god who guards you – ‘Mistress of Darkness, loud of shouts; its height cannot be known from its breadth, and its extent in space cannot be discovered. Snakes are on it, of which the number is not known; it was fashioned before the Inert One’ is your name.” You would claim the protection of gods and assert your own worth. “Mine is a name greater than yours, mightier than yours upon the road of righteousness,” says spell 144.

The most important test of all would come at the so-called Hall of the Two Maats, where





# GREE





# KS

Learn how the cradle of democracy also produced an iconic sporting event and history's most ambitious empire-builder



A 16th-century BC fresco from Knossos depicts a bull-leaping ritual  
RIGHT: A bull's head found by Arthur Evans. Bulls were venerated in Minoan culture







# THE MINOTAUR'S ISLAND

When Arthur Evans excavated Knossos in 1900, he found evidence of a peaceful, sophisticated society – a civilisation he named the Minoans. Yet, say **Bettany Hughes** and **Tim Kirby**, later finds suggest that Crete was a troubled island shaken by earthquakes, arson attacks and human sacrifice

What exactly are the million or so visitors who travel to the Bronze Age site at Knossos each year coming to see?

The first stop by the tour guides is the bust of Sir Arthur Evans, the bow-tied Englishman who excavated the site a little over a century ago. Here, visitors are told that they are entering a place where myth and prehistory meet: the palace of the legendary King Minos, powerful sea lord and ruler of Crete in the late Bronze Age. There follows the seductive cast

list – Pasiphae, Minos's bull-infatuated queen; Daedalus, master inventor; Theseus, hero from the Greek mainland; Ariadne, smart Minoan princess; and, finally, the Minotaur – that archetypal man-monster.

It's all myth, of course, say the guides. Yet Arthur Evans, in a matter of a few weeks, turned up the first evidence of a Bronze Age civilisation of astonishing wealth and beauty. It was a world of kings and snake goddesses, labyrinthine palaces complete with flush toilets and colourful murals. It was a world in which bulls and their attendants were of central, cultic importance. Knossos,

a complex archaeological enigma, becomes a backdrop for one of the ancient world's most dramatic stories. But the Minoans, for the general public, remain more than half-buried in myth.

Those parts of their civilisation that have been excavated by Evans are marked, and sometimes obscured, by his particular, even eccentric vision of who this Bronze Age people were. His vision is built into the language of Cretan archaeology – the most obvious example being the name 'Minoans' applied by Evans despite evidence suggesting that they were known, at least in the 15th century BC,



## “In Knossos you’re as likely to meet the spirit of Arthur Evans as that of the Minotaur”

as the people of Keftiu. Despite the efforts of archaeologists to talk about palace-temples, palace-like structures, court-centred compounds or festival halls, Knossos and the other Cretan Bronze Age structures of the same blueprint remain stubbornly ‘palaces’, with all the implied monarchical institutions that come with that tag.

When you thread your way through the corridors of Knossos you’re as likely to meet the spirit of Arthur Evans as that of the Minotaur. Evans was proud of “his Minoans”; he called them an “independent people” who had evolved on their island home, free from the political, cultural and military influence of the great powers of the eastern Mediterranean and what we now call the Middle East.

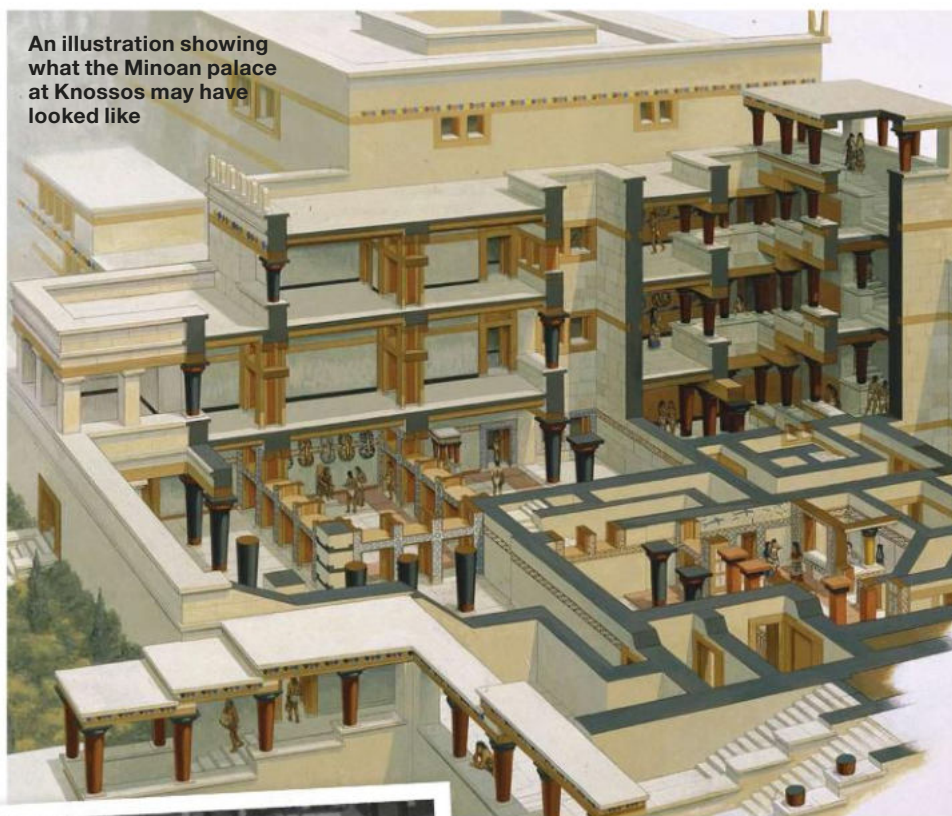
### The throne of King Minos

For Evans, the Minoans were the first Europeans, the seed from which all western cultures sprang – including, importantly, the Mycenaeans who, the archaeological record suggested, were in control of Knossos and other parts of Crete at the time of the mysterious cataclysm that engulfed the island around the mid-15th century BC.

Evans insisted on seeing the Mycenaeans not as the inheritors or conquerors of Minoan Crete but as mere squatters in the ruins of a culture that had fallen without any help from the mainlanders. In fact, many of the most iconic Minoan artefacts, such as the bull-leapers mural, date from the period of Mycenaean rule.

It’s easy to forgive Evans’s partiality. In his 1900 excavation, the finds came thick and fast. Day 2: a terracotta statuette that he called Aphrodite. Day 7: a stirrup jar of Mycenaean appearance and a Linear B tablet. Day 18: a fragment of a bull. Day 20: a stone ‘throne’. Soon afterwards, in a telegram to *The Times*, Evans announced the discovery of the “throne of King Minos”.

It’s not just the amount of material he recovered that speaks so eloquently of a civilisation for which the tag prehistoric seems patronising, it’s the sheer quality of the craftsmanship. An egg-shell-thin Kamares-ware cup has a freshness that bridges the 3,500 years that separate us from its maker



An illustration showing what the Minoan palace at Knossos may have looked like



Arthur Evans with the bull's head he found at Knossos

(before you realise that it is probably a ritual vessel designed to hold sacrificial blood).

Evans wasn’t too keen to acknowledge the blood. Though he was aware of archaeological evidence to the contrary – inland fortifications, hillforts and so on – he preferred to describe Bronze Age Crete as an island of peace, prosperity and high culture, where palaces were connected by well-made roads and everything was protected by an all-powerful navy (for which there is little or no evidence).

In fact, recent decades have produced evidence to challenge Evans’s Eden-like vision. A darker picture has emerged of a troubled island regularly engulfed by disasters both natural and man-made, threatening its stability and survival as a bastion of civilisation and culture.

At Anemospilia in 1979, Iannis Sakellarakis excavated a small shrine destroyed by an earthquake in c1700 BC. The dig uncovered a ‘Bronze Age crime scene’. The bodies of what are thought to be a priest and his female attendant were found, along with their victim, a young man aged about 17, who had been trussed up on an altar, his throat cut as an offering to the gods. The fact that the ritual was brought to an abrupt halt by an earthquake demonstrates the kind of forces Minoan rituals were designed to appease.

Further evidence of man-made acts of violence and deliberate destruction were discovered elsewhere on the island. At Zakros, Ayia Triada and Palaikastro, archaeologists have found evidence suggesting that arson attacks on palaces and significant buildings were a regular feature of Minoan politics. At Ayia Triada, a fire was started in an oil storehouse – the Bronze Age equivalent of a blaze in an oil refinery. The heat was so intense that the marble floor was vitrified – turned to glass.

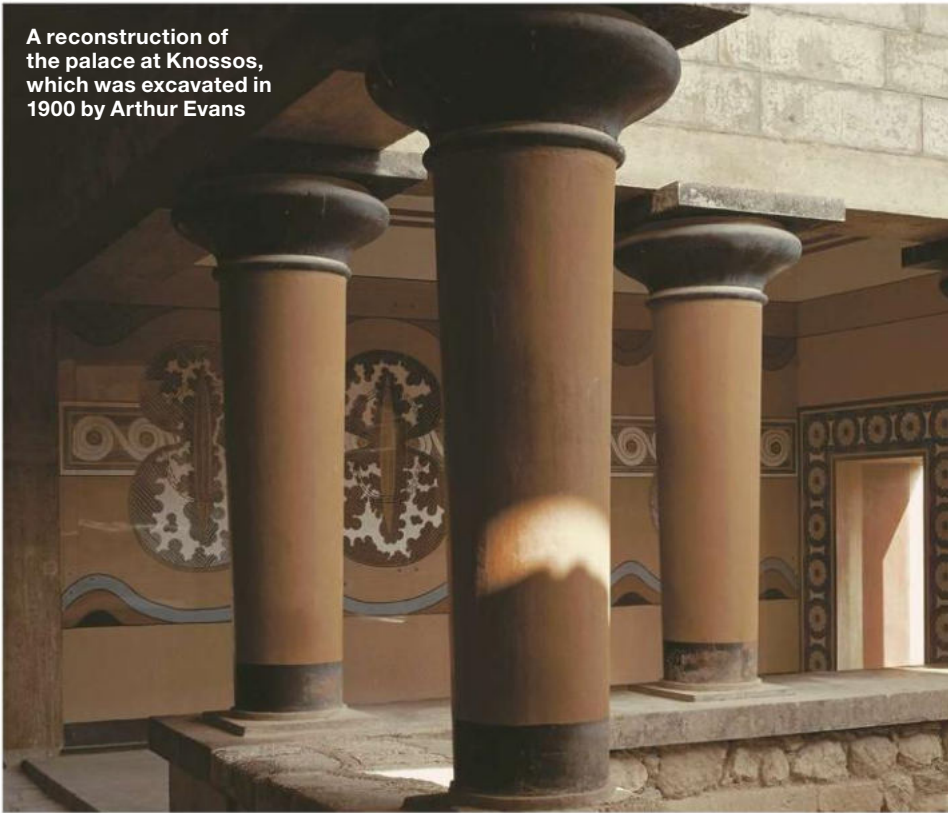
### The spectre of human sacrifice

At Knossos, Peter Warren’s excavations of an area known as the threshing floor has revealed evidence of a more troubling kind: the bones of young children incised with cut marks showing that the flesh had been cut away using butcher’s knives. Along with the bones were the shells of a species of edible snail, suggesting that infant cannibalism was practised in Minoan Crete.

The finds at the ‘House of the Sacrificed



A reconstruction of the palace at Knossos, which was excavated in 1900 by Arthur Evans



Children' appear to date from a period when, according to some authorities, Crete was suffering from the environmental catastrophe caused by the eruption of the island Thera (Santorini) 70 miles north of Crete. Plausible scenarios have described a kind of nuclear winter caused by the enormous clouds of ash that were thrown up, leading to a series of bad harvests and widespread famine. Whether the sacrificed children died to appease the Gods or from hunger pangs remains a moot point.

The most vivid example of the violent forces that periodically wracked Minoan Crete is the Palaikastro kouros (sculpture of a boy) discovered and painstakingly reassembled between 1987 and 1990 by a team of archaeologists lead by Hugh Sackett, Alexander MacGillivray and Jan Driessen, and now on display at Sitia Museum. Crafted from hippopotamus ivory and gold, the figure

was once displayed in a specially converted shrine in the eastern town of Palaikastro. In the mid-15th century BC, the shrine was attacked, set on fire and blown apart. The kouros was ritually castrated and smashed before being tossed into the flames.

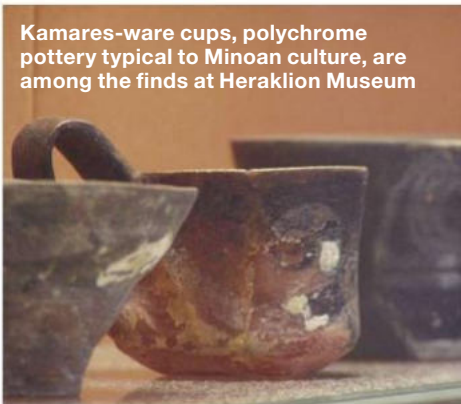
Why was it the focus of such fury? One theory is that the figure was the focus of a new religious cult that had taken root. In a culture dominated by representations of powerful female figures (whether goddesses or priestesses) the kouros was a male deity, possibly even the god that the Greeks would call Zeus Cretagenes (Cretan-born Zeus) who, according to myth, was raised in Crete to preserve him from the infanticidal rage of his father, Kronos. Perhaps some Minoans turned to a new, male god for protection, and provoked the fury of old believers.

It is salutary to consider the kouros alongside other Minoan icons – the snake goddess, the flirtatious mural-girl known as La Parisienne, that magnificent pied bull and the athletic bull-leapers. None of them tells the whole story of the unique culture that flourished in Bronze Age Crete for two millennia, and none can be overlooked if we are to understand how and why a whole culture disappeared and a whole civilisation became 'lost'. ■

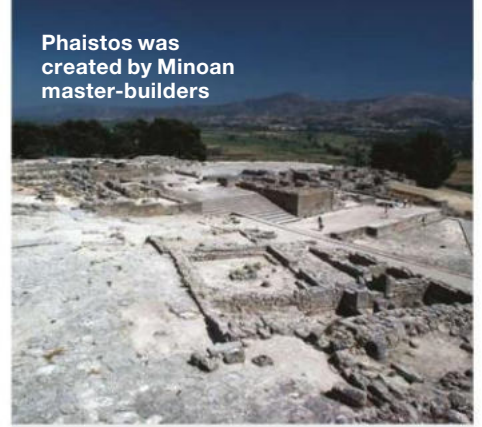
**Bettany Hughes** is a historian, broadcaster and author of *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life* (Vintage, 2011).

**Tim Kirby** is a director and producer specialising in history, archaeology and arts programmes

Kamares-ware cups, polychrome pottery typical to Minoan culture, are among the finds at Heraklion Museum



Phaistos was created by Minoan master-builders



## Beyond Knossos

The Minoan way of life and death: six more fascinating sites to visit on Crete

### 1 Archanes-Phourni

A huge cemetery in continuous use for 1,200 years (2400–1200 BC), Phourni (near the town of Archanes) provides a remarkable record of the Minoan way of death from the earliest known period to the Mycenaean twilight.

### 2 Vathypetro

This farmhouse or manor house a short drive south from Phourni dates from c1580 BC. It was destroyed by an earthquake c1550.

### 3 Skotino

Before palaces became the focus of religion, the Minoans communed with their gods on the top of mountains (peak sanctuaries) and in the depths of caves. Skotino is one of the deepest such caves. Take a torch or a guide.

### 4 Phaistos

The most impressive palace after Knossos sits in a beautiful setting with views of Mount Ida. Among finds here was the Phaistos disc, a circular clay tablet covered in a spiral of unknown script; see it at the Heraklion Museum.

### 5 Gournia

This late Minoan town clings to a bare rocky hill with views to the sea. The layout of streets and buildings is perfectly preserved, and walking around it you're struck by the similarities between this ancient site and the small Cretan hilltop villages of today.

### 6 Sitia museum

This is the home of one of the least-known masterpieces of Minoan art, the Palaikastro kouros. The workmanship on this ivory-and-gold figure is staggering, his veins, sinews and bones rendered with an almost fanatical realism. Sitia is a two-hour drive east of Heraklion.



# The battle of Marathon – more important than Hastings?

Two and a half millennia ago, a small Athenian army defeated a huge Persian invasion force in a clash that has been hailed as a turning point in world history. **Michael Scott** asks: how significant was the battle of Marathon?

GETTY IMAGES



**The Romans pay tribute**  
The front of a Roman sarcophagus celebrates Athens' triumph at the battle of Marathon



*“For if you agree with me that we should fight, you make your country free and your city the best in all of Greece. But if you choose not to fight, we will lose it all”*  
(HERODOTUS 6.109)

**S**o spoke the Athenian general Miltiades to his fellow general Callimachus, setting in motion one of the greatest military gambles in history.

The year was 490 BC. The place was Marathon. The mission: to repel the invasion of the Persian army – the largest fighting force ancient Greece had ever seen.

In early August that year, guided by the traitor Hippias, the exiled tyrant of Athens, Persian forces landed in the bay of Marathon, just 25 miles north of the city. Persian numbers were enormous. The ancient historian Herodotus stated that the Persians brought 600 *triremes* (fighting ships) full of men; the later historians Plutarch and Pausanias put the total Persian force at 300,000.

The Persians’ mission? Revenge. Their king, Darius, was furious that the Athenians and Eretrians (inhabitants of the island now called Euboea) had assisted a revolt taking place on the borders of the Persian king’s empire along the Ionian coast (in modern-day Turkey). The revolt had eventually been crushed but Darius decided, once and for all, to put an end to Greece – to his mind, an annoying flea on the hide of the much-larger Persian empire. His massive forces set sail across the Aegean Sea, decimated the island of Naxos, ran roughshod over the Eretrians and landed at Marathon, with Athens the next target.

Hearing of the Persian landing at Marathon, the Athenians scrambled every soldier they had – a force comprising only 9,000 men, with an additional 1,000 sent by the nearby city of Plataea, according to the ancient historians.

The Athenians also sent a runner, Pheidippides, to Sparta (a distance of 140 miles) to ask for help. The Spartans, in the middle of one of their religious festivals, replied that they would not be able to send their troops for 10 days. Pheidippides ran the 140 miles back to join the Athenian ranks at Marathon, carrying the devastating news that the Athenians and Plataeans would have to face the might of Persia without Spartan reinforcements. As the enormous Persian army beached its ships and set up battle lines on the plain of Marathon, the small Athenian and Plataean force blocked the narrow passes out of the plain that led to Athens.

A stalemate ensued, broken only when the Athenian general Miltiades convinced his fellow general Callimachus that the Greeks should attack, declaiming the rousing words quoted above. On 12 August (or perhaps 12 September, depending on how you interpret the ancient calendars) 490 BC, the Greek forces – for the first time ever in battle, according to Herodotus – ran rather than marched the 1,500m that separated them from their enemy. They did so with such

## TIMELINE

### The battle of Marathon

#### Early August 490 BC

##### The Persians land

Persian forces arrive at Marathon, guided by Hippias, exiled tyrant of Athens. Hippias hopes to return to power in Athens, overturning the fledgling democracy.

##### The Athenians arrive at Marathon

Miltiades and the other Athenian generals concentrate their forces in the narrow exits of the Marathon plain to trap the Persians.

##### Pheidippides heads for Sparta

The runner is sent to ask for Spartan help. During his run, in the mountains of Tegea, he is said to have been visited by the god Pan who asks for worship in Athens in return for his help at the battle. The Spartans refuse to send reinforcements till their Carneia festival is over. Pheidippides returns with the bad news.

##### A Persian breakout is blocked

The Persians may have attempted a quick advance that was thwarted by the Athenians. The Athenians don’t want to engage the massive Persian army in open battle. A stalemate develops.

##### The Athenians decide to strike

Five days into the stalemate, Miltiades convinces the Athenian overall commander, Callimachus, to attack sooner rather than later, before the Persians can fully deploy their heavily armed cavalry.

#### 12 August (or 12 September) 490 BC

##### Miltiades leads the Athenians into battle

Miltiades spreads out the Athenian line, making it weaker in the centre. The Athenians run at the Persians.

##### The Persians are routed

The stronger Athenian flanks beat the lightly armed Persian flanks, though the Persian centre holds back the weaker Athenian centre. The god Pan and the legendary Athenian hero Theseus are said to have been seen fighting in the Athenian ranks. The Athenian flanks surround the Persian centre and push the Persians back to their ships. Many Persians drown in the marshes as they try to set sail.

##### The victors return to Athens

The Athenian army immediately marches the 26 miles back to Athens in case the Persians try to attack south of Athens.

##### The Spartan army arrives

The next day, Spartan forces arrive, having missed the battle but in time to witness the true extent of Athens’ victory.





frenzied passion that the Persians thought they'd gone mad.

The small Greek force, comprising heavily armed citizen-soldiers, quickly broke the lightly armed Persian flanks before turning inwards to crush the enemy's stronger centre. The Athenian general Callimachus was killed, along with 192 Athenian soldiers and 11 Plataeans. But the Persian losses were much greater: 6,400 soldiers and seven ships. The defeated Persian forces hurried to their remaining ships, many drowning in the marshes surrounding Marathon.

Once at sea, the Persian fleet attempted to menace Athens again along its southern coast but, seeing the Athenian forces drawing up to defend the city after quickly marching the 26 miles from Marathon to Athens, the Persians gave up and sailed away. The Athenians, with Plataean help, had won a victory for freedom – not just the freedom of their cities, but freedom for all of Greece.

## Its significance then

Today, over 2,500 years after Marathon, runners in cities around the world compete in marathon races. This distance is supposed to symbolise the Athenians' 26-mile return journey from the battle – and, in particular, the soldier Pheidippides' run from Marathon to Athens to relay news of the victory.

But just how important is this battle? Historian ES Creasy, in 1851, included Marathon in his account of the 15 decisive battles of world history. More famously, in 1846 John Stuart Mill declared in his essay on early Grecian history and legend: "The true ancestors of the European nations are not those from whose blood they are sprung, but those from whom they derive the richest portion of their inheritance. The battle of Marathon, even as an event in British history, is more important than the battle of Hastings. If the issue of that day had been different, the Britons and the Saxons might still have been wandering in the woods."

Is Mill right in such a claim? Just what was the significance of the battle of Marathon for Persia, Greece, Athens – and for us today? For the Persians, Marathon's significance was, perhaps surprisingly, minimal. The Persian king had almost infinite resources within



**The quick and the dead** A sixth-century BC Greek vase shows running soldiers. At Marathon, the Athenian troops were said to have run into battle – an unusual action

a huge empire. Only ten years later, Darius's son, Xerxes, would return with an even larger force to attack Greece. That invasion was famously held up by 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, and would later be defeated by a unified Greek force at Plataea and Salamis.

Yet those victories at Plataea, Salamis and Thermopylae might not have been possible without the result at Marathon – because Marathon was the first ever battle in which the Greeks defeated the Persians. It proved that such an outcome was possible.

It was undoubtedly to the Athenians that Marathon made the most difference. It was, after all – some Plataean assistance aside – their victory. That fact not only strengthened the fledgling democracy at Athens (which had come into existence only about 20 years before), but also made Athens the respected powerhouse of Greece.

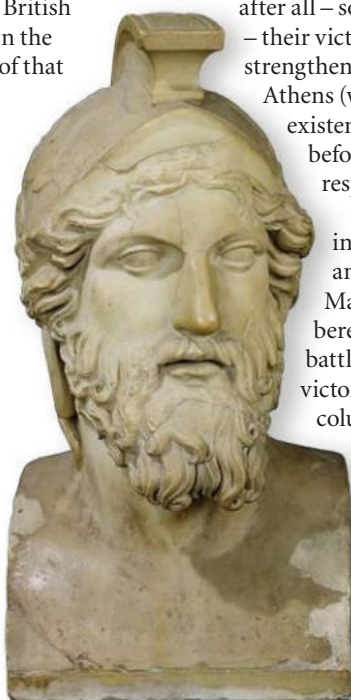
The Athenians lost no time in ensuring that this message, and their ownership of the Marathon legend, be remembered for all time. At the battlefield they constructed a victory trophy – a 10-metre-high column of marble – and a burial mound, nine metres high and 50 metres wide, for the 192 Athenians who had died. (It was a special honour to be buried at the battle site rather than back in the public cemetery in

**“It has been cast as a battle between western freedom and eastern despotism”**

Athens.) Both are still visible at Marathon today. On the Acropolis – the central sacred area of Athens – in the place where the Parthenon would be built 50 years later, a great temple seems to have been begun; ten years later it was destroyed by the second Persian invasion before it could be completed.

In addition, a nine-metre-high statue of Athena, patron deity of the city, was erected near the new temple, paid for with war booty taken at Marathon. A temple was built at Sounion, on the southern tip of Attica, and another at Rhamnous, a sanctuary not far from the plain of Marathon.

Athens also boasted of its victory at the international level. At the great panhellenic sanctuary of Olympia, Miltiades offered a helmet inscribed with the details of the victory (on display today in the Olympia museum). At the international sanctuary of Delphi, Athens built an expensive statue group in bronze and a treasure house in marble. These statues, buildings and war-booty made visible Athens' victory to the ancient world and, in turn, made Marathon more than a battle by enshrining it within

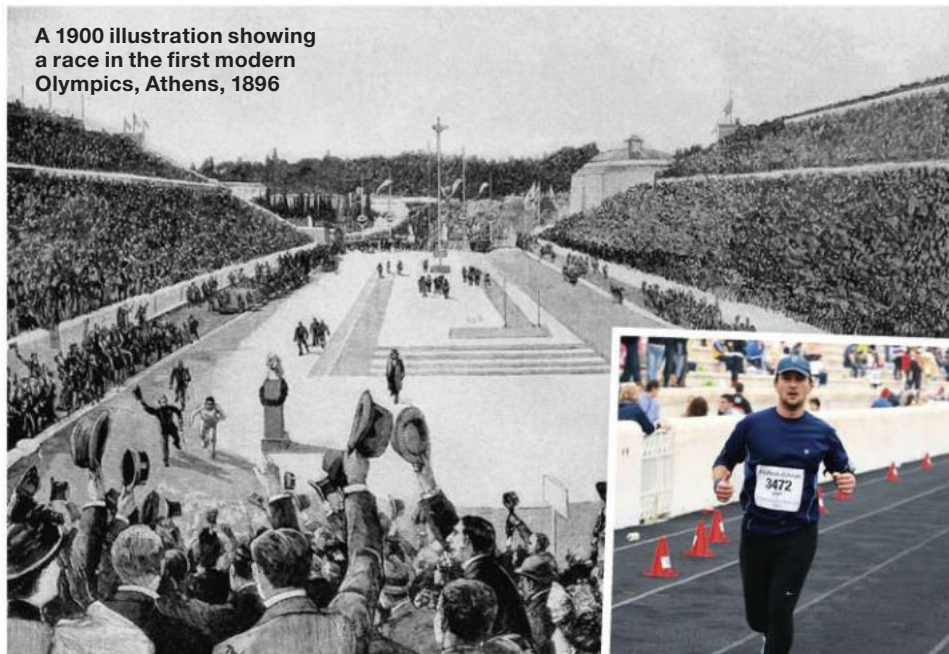


**A bust of Miltiades, the architect of the Athenian victory**





A re-creation of the marble column that was built to honour the Athenians killed in the battle of Marathon



A 1900 illustration showing a race in the first modern Olympics, Athens, 1896



Michael Scott competed in the Athens Classic Marathon in November 2007

## Pheidippides' legacy

From the battle of Marathon to the modern Olympic games

Athens' identity, as a metaphor for its place as the first city in Greece and as the guarantors of Greece's freedom.

Athens, and its successors in the ancient world, continued to trade on the Marathon label over time. As the events of the fifth century BC unfolded – as the Persians returned and were beaten back by an alliance of Greek states; as Athens grew its empire and built the Parthenon; as it lost it all during the course of the 30-year Peloponnesian war – Marathon became the victory Athens looked back on as the defining moment of its glory days.

Miltiades's son, Cimon, constructed new monuments in Marathon's honour in the mid-fifth century; Lycurgus, the reformer of the fourth century BC, would look back on Marathon as the moment when the Athenians were champions of the Greeks; and the Attalids of Pergamon, self-styled successors of Athens in the second century BC, placed their victories on a par with the victory at Marathon and Greek victory in the Trojan War.

### Its significance now

But is Marathon still important for us today – more so than Hastings, even? On the one hand, it is easy to play the 'what if' game: if Greece had fallen at Marathon, what would Europe look like? Certainly, the answer is that it would have been different.

But, on the other hand, perhaps a better understanding of why Mill thought Marathon more important than Hastings can be gained through examining the outlook of Mill's own time. Western Europe, in the 19th century,

According to Herodotus, who wrote 70 years after the battle of Marathon, a man called Pheidippides (or perhaps Philippides) ran the 280 miles from Athens to Sparta and back to ask for Spartan help before the battle.

However, Herodotus does not mention the commonly held modern story that, after the battle, Pheidippides ran from Marathon to Athens to announce the victory – after which, so the story goes, he died, having uttered the final words: "Joy to you, we've won." Instead, according to Herodotus, the whole Athenian army marched quickly back to Athens in case of a second Persian invasion attempt.

We have to wait until the first century BC for an account in which a single runner returned to announce victory, and until AD 180, in the writings of Lucian, to see that story in full. It was Lucian's story of Pheidippides running the 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to relay

the good news that was commemorated in Robert Browning's poem of 1879, entitled *Pheidippides*.

The romantic idea of this story led Michel Bréal to suggest to Pierre de Coubertin, the organiser of the first modern Olympics in 1896, that a 'Marathon' race be included. The course was laid out from Marathon to Athens, following as closely as possible the route of the original journey. The winner of that first race was a Greek, Spyros Louis. The Athens Marathon (formerly the Athens Classic Marathon), an annual event run each November, also follows a route from Marathon to Athens.

Marathon races are now held all over the world. The exact distance recognised today – 42.195km – was not fixed until the London Olympics of 1908. The route is said to have been slightly extended to ensure that it covered the distance from Windsor Castle and finished right in front of the royal box in the Olympic stadium.

was in the grip of 'philhellenism' – a love of all things Greek. The Greek nation had been recently reborn after its own war of independence from Ottoman control.

Coupled with the increasing popularity of a grand narrative of European history that joined the west and freedom, and pitched it against the east and despotism, it is easy to see how Herodotus's story of ancient Greece's conflict against Persia, and particularly the battle of Marathon, gained such notoriety and importance.

For Mill and others, Marathon became an obvious and crucial turning point in a

particular rendering of Europe's, and Britain's, past. Marathon became critical – more so than the battle of Hastings – to the kind of story historians wanted to tell. But whether that way of understanding our history is still appropriate and useful for us, 2,500 years on, is a question we now need to answer all over again. **H**

**Michael Scott** is an author and broadcaster, and an associate professor in classics and ancient history at the University of Warwick. His new book on the ancient world will be published by Hutchinson in spring 2016



Pericles delivers a speech  
before the backdrop of the  
Acropolis in Philipp von Foltz's  
19th-century painting



# Greek democracy

Athenians enjoyed more power over their political destinies than any other citizens in history. Indeed, says **Peter Jones**, they would have regarded modern democracies as a sham

The word 'democracy' derives from the ancient Greek *dēmos*, meaning 'citizen body', and *kratos*, 'power'. The concept was invented in Athens in 508 BC by the nobleman Cleisthenes and lasted 180 years, changing format constantly but never straying from its central principle: that the Athenian *dēmos* (males over 18), meeting in the Assembly every eight days, made every decision that our politicians make for us today.

Randomly selected members of the *dēmos* also sat on the juries, making every legal decision – in both political and criminal trials – without control from any higher authority. In other words, there was no 'separation of powers', and the *dēmos* was sovereign.

Athenian democracy was a unique system of government that was to last until 323 BC, when Macedonian Greeks, in a campaign begun by King Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, consigned it to history. It has yet to be revived.

## 1 Democracy at its purest?

It is commonly said of Athens that it was not a democracy because women and slaves couldn't vote. But 2,500 years ago, uniquely among all nations then and since, it established the principle that those qualifying as citizens, irrespective of wealth, status or connections, could determine their own political fate.

Governments have always resisted this idea. In the UK it was not until 1928 that all male and female citizens got the vote. No society ever gave the vote to slaves, and only in Switzerland is there a system which in certain cases resembles real democracy, with citizens debating and voting on laws in popular assemblies.

It is said that Greek democracy 'depended on slavery'. In fact, slavery was not widely stamped out around the world until the 19th century; many societies depended on slavery. (See page 46 for a discussion on the role slavery may have played in the evolution of democracy.)



## 2 People power

Modern democracy gives power to the people – but in the UK only the power to vote in or out 650 MPs every five years. Elected MPs belong to parties, and the majority party takes every decision on our behalf. It resists any call to refer decisions to the *dēmos*, whatever views the *dēmos* expresses. To a Greek that would have been no democracy but instead an *arkhē* ('empire') of elected *oligoi* ('few') – an 'elective oligarchy'.

Further, in the absence of parties, the Athenian *dēmos* in the Assembly was not bound by manifesto promises or traditional allegiances (for example, between the Labour party and the trade union movement). Nor was it intent on winning the next election. It had only one priority – and that was to decide where its interests lay.

## 3 Democrats, not meritocrats

The power of the *dēmos* meant what it said in another sense: the power to ensure that office was open, in rotation, to any citizen who wanted to hold it, merely by dint of being a citizen. The only way to ensure that a person could be so appointed was not by voting him into office (that is meritocratic), but by lot. To simplify, if you wanted to help run the Assembly or be minister for transport, you put your name into a hat, and if your name was pulled out, you got the job.

The decisions of the Assembly had to be overseen. To this end, Athenians appointed annually the *boulē* – a council of 500 – to serve for one year, and never more than twice. Its members (citizens over 30) put themselves forward at local level, but the final selection was made by lot. They met every day to receive business, report to and prepare the agenda for the Assembly. They also ensured that the Assembly's decisions were put into effect and kept to budget.

Another key post was that of state official. These enacted Assembly decisions and were mostly appointed by lot to positions that could be held for one year only and never again – budget controllers, architects and market-inspectors (about 700 posts in all). At the very top were the ten *stratēgoi* – military commanders who, along with the top financial posts, were the only offices that could be held in succession, without limit; they were appointed by vote, not lot.

In our system, the majority party has only around 400 members – depending on what the elections throw up – from whom to choose for the great offices of state. In Athens, the whole citizen population was available.



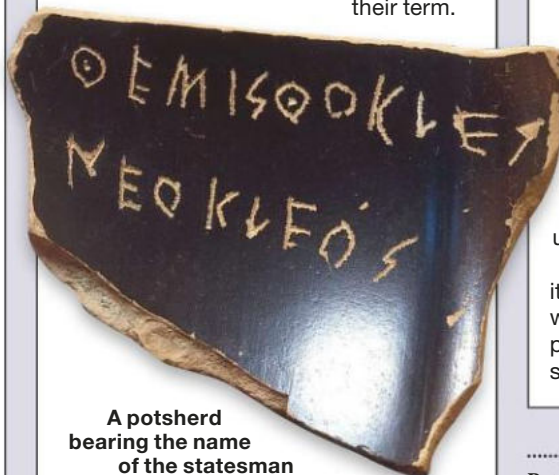
A fourth-century BC Greek juror's ballots. The hollow ballot (centre) signified condemnation; the solid ballots indicate acquittal

## 4 Death to incompetents

Surely drawing a name out of a hat was likely to produce a grotesquely incompetent officialdom? Not so. The Athenians put in place a rigorous system of checks and balances to ensure officials' professionalism: candidates were closely scrutinised before being permitted to put their names forward, the *dēmos* kept the closest of eyes on individuals' performances throughout their term of office, and failure to perform could mean paying the highest of prices.

Accusations of incompetence could be laid before the Assembly every month, and at the end of the term, performance was assessed by auditors and debated in Assembly. Officials proved to have been incompetent could be fined, exiled or executed. In fact, among the 10 military commanders, on average two were condemned to death each year. Even the great Pericles (see box 5, right) was on one occasion successfully prosecuted.

Greeks would have found nothing democratic about our parliament, which often writes its own rules regarding its conduct, expenses and salaries. And they'd have found little to recommend a system in which ministers, far from being held to public account, are waved off to the House of Lords at the end of their term.



A potsherd bearing the name of the statesman Themistocles, who was banished from Athens, c470 BC

## 5 Pericles and persuasion

It's hard to see much of a role for supreme leaders in the Athenian system. Most of us may have heard of Pericles, the great statesman who was one of the driving forces behind the development of Athenian democracy and empire in the fifth century BC. Yet what role could such a man have when the *dēmos* made decisions by a majority show of hands?

The answer is that Pericles had no more voting power in the Assembly than any other Athenian, nor any executive power to impose decisions. He was subject to Assembly decisions just like everyone else. All he had was the power of persuasion, and it was here that his authority lay.

The fact is that the Athenians rated Pericles highly. They voted him *stratēgos* 15 years in succession; when he spoke in the Assembly, they liked what they heard. Indeed, so dominant a figure was he that the contemporary historian Thucydides approvingly described Athens at that time as "nominally a democracy, but in fact the empire of the first man" – Pericles. However, he was first among equals and subject to the will of the *dēmos*.

Athenians would have found it remarkable that our government is not obliged to persuade us of anything. They would have been shocked that, on an issue like the Treaty of Lisbon (addressing the European Union's constitutional framework), government refused the *dēmos* a say. Pericles could never have got away with that.

## 6 Asacred sham

These days, 'democracy' is sacred, from Zimbabwe to China – yet Athenians would have thought our version a sham. That's not to say there is anything base or immoral about it. In fact, I suspect someone like Aristotle – no democrat – would have quite approved of its compromise between giving people some occasional say but otherwise leaving government in the hands of largely unaccountable 'experts'.

Yet there's no escaping the fact that it's not democracy. And if we called it what it is – 'elective oligarchy' – the people would understand where they stood: usually, nowhere. **H**

Peter Jones is the author of *Vote for Caesar* (Orion, 2009), which shows how ancient Greeks and Romans solved many of the problems we face today



# Democrats and **slaves**

## Master and servant

A boy waits upon a man in a Greek vase painting from the fifth century BC. Slavery and democracy existed side by side in classical Athens – and, argues Paul Cartledge, the former was crucial to the success of the latter





Classical Athens is renowned for being the birthplace of democracy. Yet it also holds the dubious distinction of being the first society with large numbers of slaves. Coincidence? Probably not, as **Paul Cartledge** explains

Is it a paradox that the society that created the world's first citizen democracy – in its original sense of people-power – also created the world's first society with large numbers of slaves, in the fullest sense of wholly owned human chattels? Or was there some essential causal connection between these two inventions by the ancient Greek city of Athens? It seems a problem worth constantly re-exploring, not least today, when freedom and democracy – always coupled together – are two of the most powerful political slogans on offer.

They managed these things differently, once upon a time. A little over 150 years ago, the northern and southern states of the (dis) United States went to war – in large part, over these very issues. That wasn't entirely odd. Unfreedom, especially unfree labour, in a variety of forms has been quite common throughout recorded human history, and it is not at all surprising that a major civil war should have been fought over the material and ideological basis of radically opposed ways of life.

However, in all human history there have been only half a dozen or so chattel slave societies. These were societies in which the predominant form of forced labour was that pumped out of human beings who were reduced, legally, to the status of things – un-persons, almost no different from cattle.

The Old South was one of those half-dozen. Old Southern slaveholders were thus practising a very rarely attested form of human bondage, and were prepared to go to war to defend their 'right' to continue to do so. The contemporary British-dominated Caribbean was another such society, which helps to account for the fact that it was in the UK that the abolitionist, anti-slavery movement spearheaded by Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce really took off.

### Intellectual revolution

If, though, one were to have surveyed unfreedom globally from a perspective of, say, 1750, few would have predicted then that within a century or so chattel slavery would have been abolished throughout the world – except in Brazil. Not the least of the ideological supports available to neoclassical 'Enlightenment' slaveholders of the mid-18th century were ancient Greeks such as the Athenians and – if in different ways – their Roman successors. Had not the Athenians owned thousands of slaves – and had they not created a mighty literature, a panoply of brilliant artworks and a civilisation of freedom that made them cultural 'ancestors'?

It took a mighty intellectual revolution,





“In all, while **mining** was at its height, up to **30,000 slaves** worked above and below ground”

predicated upon no less mighty technological and other economic advances, to persuade the majority of moving and shaking capitalists that their profits might be secured by means other than enslaved human labour power.

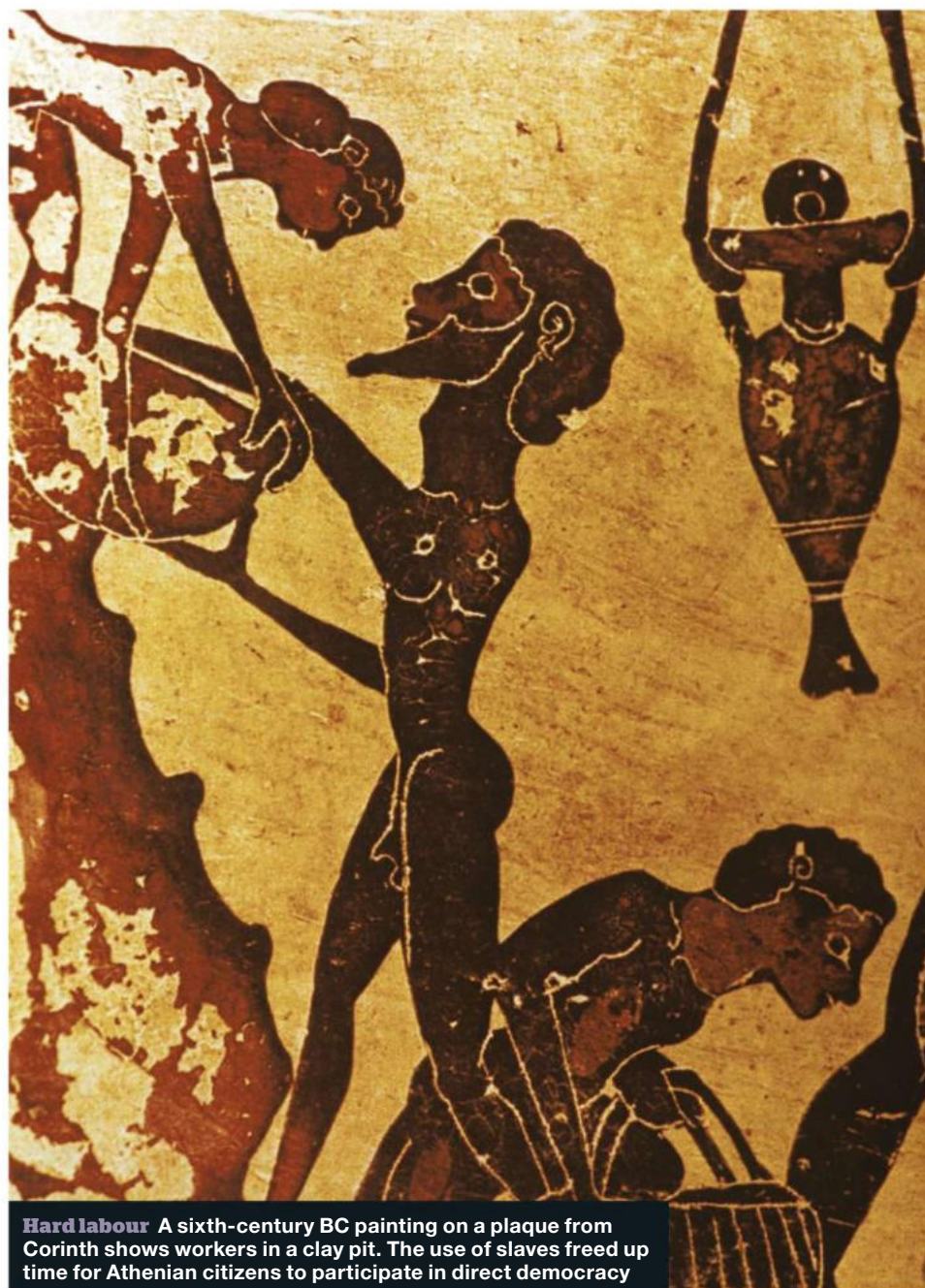
There were some 1,000 ancient Greek communities in the region that the ancients themselves called Hellas, and Athens was only one of those. It was a quite exceptional city in all sorts of ways, but not in basing its society and economy on slave labour. Its great peculiarity was that it invented democracy, so that Athens was home to the freest of all free people – the fully enfranchised adult male citizen body numbering between 25,000 and 50,000 during its ‘classical’ period, between about 500 BC and 325 BC – but also the least free of the unfree.

### Lowest of the low

At the very bottom of the heap of oppressed chattels were the mine slaves – males, often just children, small enough to wriggle their way into the pitifully low chambers from which the silver-bearing lead ore was dug. All of these were by definition foreign-born, sold into slavery by both Greek and non-Greek traders who acquired them from the eastern fringes of the Aegean Greek world, running from what is today Bulgaria in the north, all through the hinterland of the western seaboard of Turkey. For them, early death might come as a blessed release – unless they managed to run away, as many thousands did during the last phase of the disastrous Peloponnesian War against the Spartans (431–404 BC). In all, while mining was at its height, between 20,000 and 30,000 slaves might be working above and below ground.

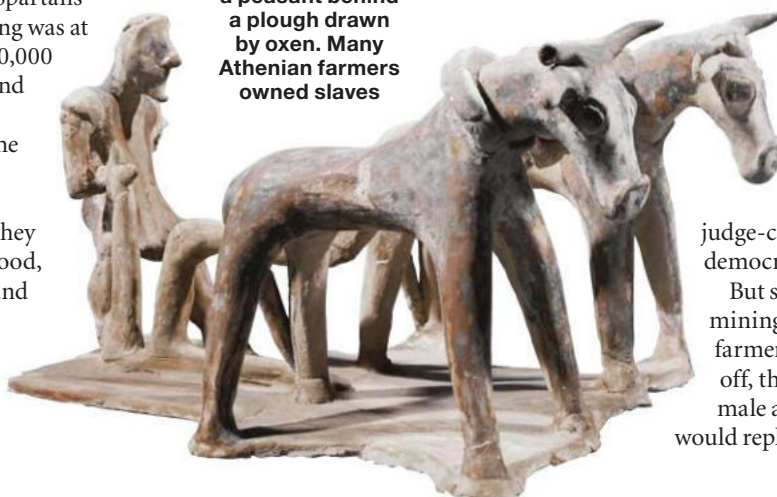
With the ore thus extracted, the Athenians coined some of the purest silver in all the eastern Mediterranean. And with that, they purchased essential supplies of food, especially wheat from Ukraine and Crimea, together with luxury products from Egypt and other countries around and beyond that between-land sea.

The silver also funded the



**Hard labour** A sixth-century BC painting on a plaque from Corinth shows workers in a clay pit. The use of slaves freed up time for Athenian citizens to participate in direct democracy

**Farm hand** A sixth-century BC Greek figurine of a peasant behind a plough drawn by oxen. Many Athenian farmers owned slaves



building of the ships that made Athens a formidable imperial naval power for many decades of the fifth century. This in turn enabled them to introduce state pay for performing necessary democratic functions – office-holding and jury service. Aristotle’s definition of the citizen as he who has an active participatory share in holding office and acting as a judge-cum-juryman fitted the Athenian democratic citizen to a T.

But slavery in Athens was not all mining. Most Athenians were peasant farmers. If they were moderately well off, they would purchase at least one male and one female slave. The male would replace or accompany the master



# How life differed for Greek and Roman slaves

Slavery is mentioned as early as the *Twelve Tables*, the foundational legal document of c500 BC underlying what the Romans called their 'public thing' – their *res publica*, or republic. The provision that slaves had to be sold 'across the Tiber' underlined one key tenet of ancient slavery: as a rigid rule, you didn't hold your own people as slaves within your own community. Slaves were, by definition, natively alienated outsiders.

It was in the third and second centuries BC, as Rome began to expand its empire right across the Mediterranean, that the supply of such slaves grew exponentially. Within a couple of hundred years, the city of Rome – by the first century BC, the largest city in the known western world – was awash with slaves performing every sort of household function.

Rich Romans were quite seriously rich. They might maintain an urban 'family' (derived from the Latin for servant) of several score, even hundreds, of slave retainers. These were slaves for show rather than strictly for use. Only an Athenian slave owner on the scale of Nikias, who reputedly owned 1,000 slaves, could begin to compete, but Nikias chose to lease out most of his slaves to work in the state-owned silver mines.

There was one huge difference – and one major compensation – for the slaves of, say, Pompey the Great at Rome compared with those of Nikias at Athens. Because the

supply of new slaves was so much more plentiful, Roman slave owners could afford to manumit their slaves much more frequently and quickly – so long as the slaves wanting their freedom could afford the purchase price demanded by their masters.

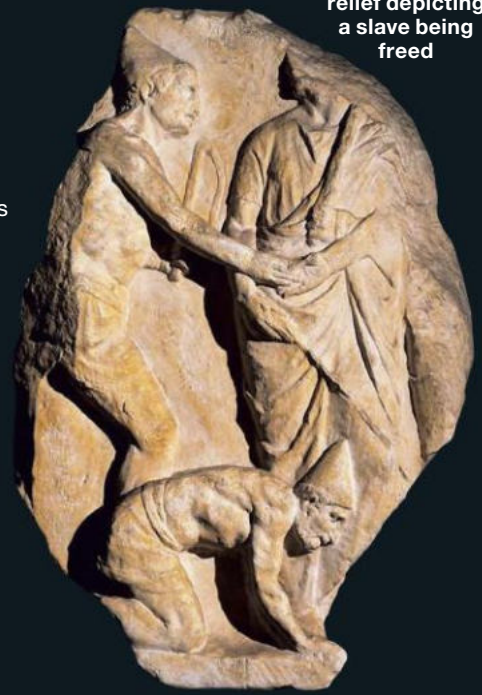
Cicero reckoned that if a slave were frugal and diligent he (this was probably a male-only privilege) might expect to be in and out of bondage in half a dozen years or so. Moreover, if the new freedman were legally liberated by a Roman citizen slave owner, he too automatically would become a Roman citizen, even if of only second-class status.

Freedom and citizenship: that would have astonished an Athenian of the fifth century BC, deeply jealous as he was of his exclusive citizen privileges. But then being a citizen of Rome under the Republic was not equivalent to being a citizen of the classical Athenian democracy.

One way of measuring the difference is to recognise that some Roman citizens – the rich, broadly speaking – were, quite literally, more equal than others. What the Romans called a republic, the Athenians would have labelled, dismissively, as an oligarchy. And a large proportion of those disempowered masses were ex-slave citizens.

Athens and Rome really were quite different from each other, and it is not

A Roman relief depicting a slave being freed



fanciful to suggest that a key reason for the differences in our cultural inheritance from the two civilisations lies in the equally crucial but radically different contributions made to each of them by slavery.

when he went on campaign (as he regularly did, on average two years in every three). The female would assist the mistress with her domestic chores of cleaning and cooking, and with her chief productive function (apart from childbearing and child rearing): the weaving of clothes and blankets.

Some of these household slaves might live most of their adult lives under the roof of the same master or mistress until death or, more rarely, until they were released from bondage. Some Athenians, such as the father of the famous politician Demosthenes, preferred to sink their wealth into owning slaves who were skilled craftsmen – in his case, slaves who made couches and knives. Life for such slaves might be relatively comfortable

and unstressful – and it's worth recalling that many of the high-grade luxury items of tableware in the 'red-figure' style that grace our museums today were crafted by slaves such as these.

So, too, the intricate stone masonry of a major temple such as that of the city's patron, Athena (sited on the Acropolis), which we know for short as the Erechtheion.

Further up the social scale were those slaves who were publicly, not privately, owned: the *demosioi*, as they were called, or 'people's slaves'. Some of those – the least educated – served as a sort of equivalent of policemen or jailers, giving

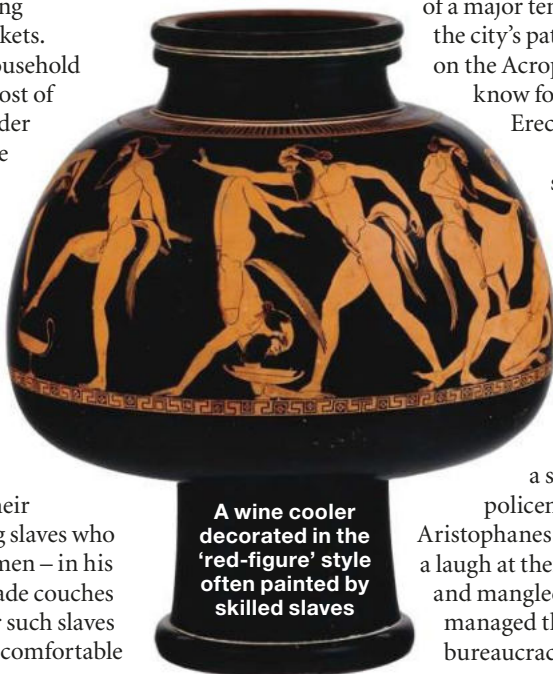
Aristophanes the chance to have a laugh at their barbarous accents and mangled Greek. But others managed the intricate literate bureaucracy on which the

Athenian democracy depended for its smooth functioning: the copying and archiving of decrees and laws, for example.

The commission charged with sorting out the tangle of laws and decrees that had proliferated during a century of democratic self-governance was placed under the charge of a public slave, or perhaps a slave who had been manumitted specially for the purpose and so granted the status of a free but unenfranchised resident alien.

Slavery in classical Athens was no simple thing. Above all else, it enabled Athenian democracy in two crucial ways. First, it furnished citizens with leisure time, without which active participation in a direct democracy would have been impossible. Second, it gave even the poorest Athenians – those who could not afford to own a single slave – that enhanced sense of personal freedom that, together with equality, served as the ideological cornerstones of the world's first example of genuine people-power. Slavery and Athenian democracy were joined at the hip. **H**

**Paul Cartledge** is emeritus AG Leventis professor of Greek culture at Cambridge University. His new book *Democracy: A Life* will be published by Oxford University Press in March 2016



A wine cooler decorated in the 'red-figure' style often painted by skilled slaves





Though more than 2,000 years separate him from us, Alexander still commands iconic status, as this 20th-century Andy Warhol print demonstrates

ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION-CORBIS



# ALEXANDER THE GREAT: THE DIVINE KILLER?

What drove the Macedonian conqueror to create a huge empire spanning three continents? **Paul Cartledge** explores the personality of the fourth-century BC military genius to uncover his passions and obsessions

Alexander the Great had no low opinion of himself. That's not surprising, given that the fourth-century BC ruler had conquered most of the known world before he reached the age of 30. Nevertheless, he appears to have been well aware of the value of self-promotion. Besides his armies of soldiers he retained a small army of writers and artists, employed to project the image of himself that he wanted to disseminate to the world at large.

Hardly anything of those original writings survives today, unfortunately – though we do have the works of ancient Greek and Roman historians and biographers such as Curtius Rufus, Arrian and Plutarch who themselves had access to the lost texts by Ptolemy, Aristoboulus, Nearchus and others. On the other hand, large numbers of portrait coins and medallions and sculptures do survive intact, some contemporary or

near-contemporary, so we have a very good idea of the impression Alexander wished to create for his many hundreds of thousands of subjects scattered over an empire stretching from what is today Greece (including Macedonia) in the west, as far east as the lands now called Afghanistan and Pakistan.

One thing about these various images is very striking: they all aim to elevate Alexander not just above the common herd of ordinary men, but above the status of the

**“He retained a small army of writers and artists, employed to project the image of himself that he wanted to broadcast”**

mere mortal – to the status of a semi-divine hero or even a god. Scholars argue about whether Alexander sent down a formal decree from Babylon (in Iraq), one of his capitals, actually ordering his subjects to worship him as a god. But there is no question that he was indeed worshipped as a living god, by Greeks as well as by his peoples farther east, and there is every likelihood that Alexander wanted to be so worshipped. This was not unprecedented: Alexander's father, Philip, had already been granted divine worship as a living god. And anything Philip could do, Alexander could do better; it's arguable that rivalry with his father was one of the biggest psychological motivating forces in all of Alexander's major projects, and one of the most powerful influences on his personality.

Philip II (reigned 359–336 BC) was, according to one contemporary historian, the most remarkable man Europe had produced. He raised his kingdom of Macedon from a small player on the Greek scene to the major



protagonist and arbiter of the Greek world. A man of violent temper and ferocious ambition, Philip fell out with Alexander's mother, Olympias (a Greek princess), quite early in their relationship. Alexander became something of a mummy's boy – not in the sense that he was ever a timid, coddled wimp, but in that his powerfully ambitious mother saw Alexander as a key weapon in her struggle with Philip, and the instrument whereby she could become not just another of Philip's seven wives but queen mother, mother of the heir apparent and, eventually, mother of the Macedonian king.

Alexander, who admired Philip but also envied his achievements, was probably happy to go along with her – perhaps even to the extent of conniving with her at Philip's public assassination at Aegae in 336 BC. However, Alexander did once quip that the highly strung Olympias made him pay a high rent for the nine months she had housed him in her womb.

## A man's best friend is his horse

Apart from his parents, there were two great influences on his life from boyhood. One was the great Thessalian stallion Bucephalus (see panel, right), whom Alexander himself tamed and from whom he was pretty much inseparable from at least his early teens until the death of the great horse, aged about 30, in Pakistan in 326 BC. So moved was Alexander by his loss that he actually named one of his new city foundations after him, in the Indus valley.

The other was Alexander's boyhood comrade Hephaestion. He came from an elite Macedonian family, and was among the close group of comrades who had the privilege of being taught alongside Alexander by the philosopher Aristotle at Mieza, to the west of the Macedonian capital of Pella. Hephaestion was a bit older, and a bit taller, than Alexander, and it is probable that at some stage their relationship was more than platonic.

Yet for Alexander sexual gratification was apparently not that important. "Sex and sleep," he is said to have remarked, "are the only two things that remind me I'm mortal." Or, as his best surviving historian Arrian (a Greek from Asia Minor writing in the second



The thrill of the chase: Alexander's friend Hephaestion (right) enjoying the hunt, in a fourth-century BC mosaic at Pella in Greece

century AD) put it, warfare and military exploits gave Alexander the sort of thrill that others derived from sexual conquest. Not that Alexander was a monk; he is said to have had sex even with a mythical Amazon queen, and to have fathered a child with his beautiful Sogdian bride Roxane (from what is today Uzbekistan). He also allegedly had an affair with the Persian wife of a dangerous Greek opponent fighting on the Persian side, and a liaison with a Persian eunuch.

What's striking is that his preferred sexual partners were mainly from outside Macedonia or Greece. Philip is said to have fought his wars by marriages – that is, by concluding diplomatic marriage alliances as a way to secure a victory or as an alternative to fighting in order to decide the issue of territorial control. On the whole, Alexander

preferred to settle disputes by fighting. However, even he took three wives, the other two – besides Roxane – both of them being Persian princesses.

## A hunter's mentality

When Alexander was not fighting, there was nothing he loved to do for relaxation more than hunt. Big-game hunting, that is – wild boar and lions, not child's-play quarries such as hares or doves. In Macedon there were two tests of manhood: killing a wild boar and killing a man in battle. Alexander had passed both of those by the time he was 16, besides hunting the wild mountain lions and sharp-eyed lynx that still abounded in the western Macedonian upland country.

Bucephalus served Alexander no less faithfully as his hunting mount than as his

## TIMELINE

### 356 BC

Alexander is born at Pella, Macedonia, son of King Philip II and his fourth wife, the Greek princess Olympias



Alexander's parents: a coin showing Philip II (far left) and a gold medallion of Olympias

### 336 BC

Alexander accedes to throne of Macedon. His role, if any, in the assassination of his father is unclear, but it is not unlikely that his mother has a hand in it

### 336 BC

Philip had been about to embark on a Greek-Macedonian campaign against the Persian empire. As his successor, Alexander has himself recognised as leader of the Persian expedition





## Alexander wins on the horses

How he tamed Bucephalus

One day Philoneicus of Thessaly brought Philip a horse named Bucephalus, offering him for sale. The horse allowed no one to mount him... and reared up against anyone who approached him. Philip was angry at being offered an unbroken and vicious animal, and told Philoneicus to take him away.

Alexander exclaimed: "What a horse they are losing! And just because they lack the knowledge or courage to handle him." Philip asked him: "Do you think you know more than your elders? Do you criticise them because you believe you can manage horses better?" "Yes," replied Alexander. "At least I can manage this one better." "And if you cannot," said his father, "what price are you prepared to pay for your insolence?" "The price of the horse," replied the boy.

Amid general laughter, father and son settled the terms of the bet. Alexander ran to Bucephalus, grasped his reins and turned him towards the sun. For he had noticed that the horse was panicked by the sight of his own shadow... When he saw that the horse was over his fears and eager for a gallop, Alexander urged him forward, controlling him with his commanding voice and with a touch of his heels... Philip wept for joy, kissed Alexander and said: "My son, Macedonia is too small for you – you'd better find a kingdom your own size."

*From Plutarch's Life of Alexander, chapter 6, author's translation*



Alexander on his warhorse Bucephalus

## "Warfare and military exploits gave Alexander the sort of thrill that others derived from sexual conquest"

number-one warhorse. When the going got tough on campaign (as it did in regions now covered by Iran, Afghanistan and central Asia after he had defeated Great King Darius III of Persia and taken his crown), a reward for any success was a day's hunting in a game park. In one of these hunting sprees near modern Samarkand, reputedly no fewer than 4,000 animals were slaughtered. It was the same dedicated hunter's mentality that made Alexander ruthless in pursuit of all his goals.

Historians have argued since antiquity over

what Alexander's ultimate goal might have been, had he not died prematurely (probably of a malarial or typhoid fever rather than by an assassin's poison-bearing hand) at Babylon in 323 BC, aged just 32. One theory takes us back to our starting point: his self-projection as being more than merely mortal. Certainly, he was religious, even superstitious, a trait he seems to have inherited – or, at any rate, could easily have learned from his mother.

He relied especially heavily on the guidance of his personal diviner, Aristander, a Greek



A Roman mosaic depicting Alexander at the battle of Issus

### 334 BC

**Alexander wins the battle of the Granicus river** – the first of four major battles – against a coalition of the Persian Great King's satraps (viceroys) in the Troad (north-west Anatolia)

### 333 BC

**Alexander wins the battle of Issus** (in southern Turkey). Darius III of Persia surrenders the advantages of surprise and numerical superiority to Alexander's tactical genius and personal leadership

### 332 BC

**Alexander accomplishes the siege of Tyre** (in modern Lebanon), an island city that he reaches by building a causeway from the mainland. Victory costs many lives and takes seven months

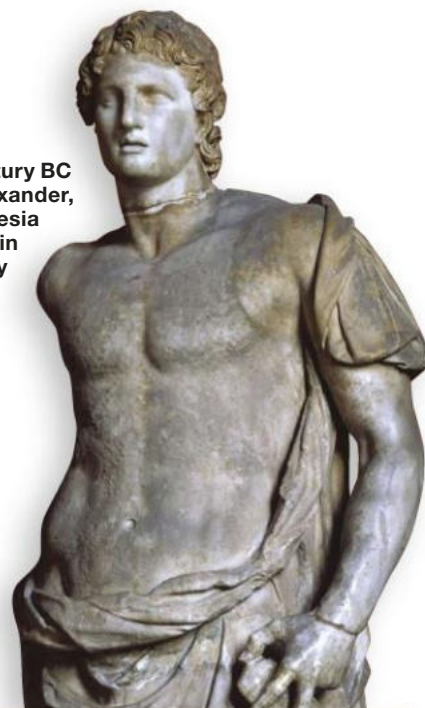


from Telmissus in what is now south-west Turkey. Aristander's interpretation of portents such as the behaviour of birds could mean life or death for Alexander's supposed friends as much as for his sworn enemies. Consultation of oracular shrines was a fixed part of Alexander's routine. Apollo's seat at Delphi in central Greece was hardly out of his way in 336 BC, and the priestess there was made to prophesy that he would be invincible.

But the trip to the oasis of Siwa in Egypt's western desert in 332 BC, a dangerous journey over several hundred waterless and dust-ridden miles, was a different proposition. Alexander gravely announced that the oracle's presiding deity, Ammon, whom the Greeks often identified with their

**“The oracle confirmed Alexander in his belief that he had been born the son of a god rather than a mere mortal”**

A second-century BC statue of Alexander, found at Magnesia ad Sipylum in Turkey



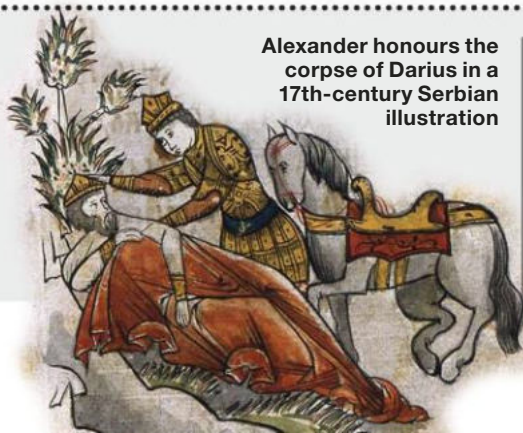
## Alexander's campaigns in Europe and Asia, 336–323 BC



### 331 BC

Alexander wins the battle of Gaugamela, the decisive clash against Darius fought in northern Iraq. Heavily outnumbered, Alexander again wins through tactical genius and personal leadership

Alexander honours the corpse of Darius in a 17th-century Serbian illustration



### 328 BC

A drunken Alexander kills 'Black' Cleitus, a companion from childhood who had saved his life at the Granicus, for suggesting that Alexander's impressive victories were not entirely and solely due to him

### 326 BC

Alexander wins the battle of the river Hydaspes (now in Pakistan). Fighting as king of Asia to extend his own empire, Alexander defeats the very tall rajah of the Paurava people and his war elephants




Zeus, had promised him his heart's desire. But what that was must be inferred from his subsequent behaviour. It was something to do with the truth about his origins; the oracle seems to have confirmed Alexander in his belief that he had been born the son of a god rather than a mere mortal.

Not all of his closest companions were as enamoured as he was of the notion that Philip was just Alexander's 'so-called father'. Nor did they all follow Hephaestion's lead in paying to Alexander the kind of public adoration that they thought was appropriate only for a true Olympian divinity. Persians, too, had not been in the habit of recognising their Great King as a living god but had seen him rather as the vicar on Earth of the great god of light, Ahura Mazda.

On the other hand, some of Alexander's other subjects – the Egyptians, for example – would have thought less of him as their king if he had not been the recipient of divine worship. So, as well as being one of the major drivers of his personality, Alexander's intimations of godhead could easily have been one of the major causes of dissension at the heart of his mixed court of Greeks and other peoples.

Posterity, though (see panel, right), has generally been more kind to Alexander, variously venerating or indeed worshipping him as a saint as well as a wonder-working holy man and military hero. Within the sphere of recent critical scholarship, however, a distinct note of hostility can be detected, influenced perhaps by contemporary experience of bloodshed in regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq once traversed by Alexander himself. Those scholars who see Alexander as little but a natural-born killer might bear in mind the words of the American poet Robert Lowell, in his poem *The Death of Alexander*:

*"No one was like him. Terrible were his crimes  
– but if you wish to blackguard the Great King,  
think how mean, obscure, and dull you are,  
your labors lowly and your merits less..."* 

Paul Cartledge is the author of more than 20 books, including *Alexander the Great: The Truth Behind the Myth* (Pan, 2013)

## Alexander: the legend

His exploits have inspired artists and storytellers across ages and continents

Alexander's early death was the occasion of a prolonged orgy of funeral games, contested between his so-called successors on a number of Middle-Eastern battlefields.

Among the biggest winners was Ptolemy, son of Lagos, a Macedonian companion of the king from his boyhood. Ptolemy advertised his connection with Alexander and sought to bask in his aura as well as to consolidate his rule of Egypt by issuing coins of gold and of silver bearing handsome and flattering portraits of his late lord and master. This set the precedent for any number of generals and rulers, modern as well as ancient, from the Roman proconsul Pompeius Magnus (Pompey the Great) to Napoleon and beyond. All sought to imitate, if not emulate, at least the outward show of Alexander's feats and fame.

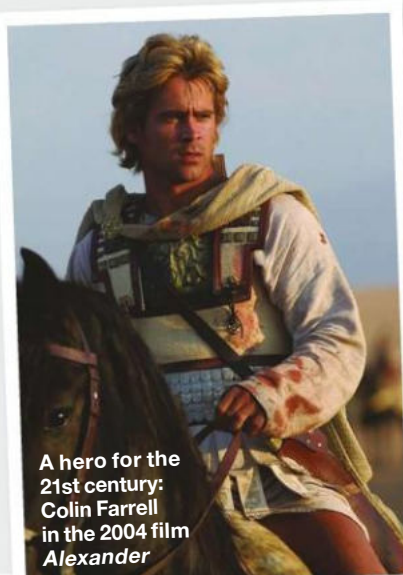
Alexander has featured in the national literatures of some 80 countries; he has been hymned by countless bards and minstrels over the past two and a half millennia; and he has been depicted in the sacred and secular art of both western and eastern cultures. A saint in the Coptic Christian church of Egypt, he is, though, execrated as a villain and a thief by

A hero for the Renaissance:  
a 16th-century Italian  
imagining of Alexander  
the Great



followers of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster (including the modern Parsees – their name is derived from Persia). For them, Alexander is the devil incarnate who overthrew the legitimate king of Persia, a devotee of Ahura Mazda, and burned the Persians' sacred books in the conflagration of Persepolis in 330 BC.

For many people today, though, Alexander is still an object of hero-worship and perhaps veneration, even among those who have no direct connection with him and his deeds. In the 20th century his image was raised to the status of an icon in an Andy Warhol print. In the 21st century, Oliver Stone's 2004 movie, using the supposed memoirs of Ptolemy as its narrative device, gave him exposure to a modern audience of millions. Surely, Alexander would have considered that nothing more than his due.



A hero for the  
21st century:  
Colin Farrell  
in the 2004 film  
*Alexander*

### 326 BC

**Alexander's troops mutiny at the river Hyphasis** (Beas); the footsore and homesick troops refuse to continue any further on Alexander's military quest eastward

### 324 BC

**Troops mutiny again at Opis** (roughly modern Baghdad); faced with insurrection, Alexander cashiers 10,000 of his mainly Macedonian troops and stages a huge banquet of reconciliation

### 323 BC

**Alexander dies at Babylon.** The cause of death is a fever, possibly malaria or typhus, aggravated by an alcoholic bender; some theories suggest that he was assassinated by poison



Greek coin showing  
Alexander, minted  
after his death



A blue-toned photograph of a classical statue of a woman, likely a Roman goddess or deity, holding a large, shallow, ornate bowl. The statue is positioned centrally, with its head and upper torso visible. The bowl is held in front of the statue's chest. The word "ROM" is overlaid in large, white, serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

# ROM



# ANS

Meet the people of Rome – generals and emperors, citizens and slaves – and discover how they ate, drank, shopped, fought and loved





A section of Trajan's column, which was erected in Rome in AD 113 to commemorate his conquest of Dacia, beyond the Danube

# A RISING STAR

Through centuries of war, Rome conquered and controlled a mighty empire – but what drove its seemingly insatiable expansionist ambitions?

**Jeremy Paterson** examines how and why the Roman state evolved as it did, and how it brought peace and prosperity to its subjects



## ROME'S CREATORS AND ITS CHALLENGERS



### Hannibal

(LIVED 247-183 BC)

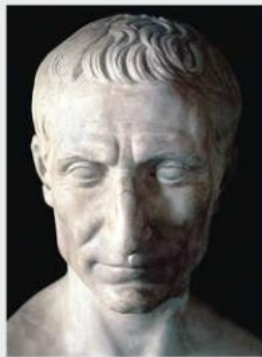
The Carthaginian general during the Second Punic War (218–202 BC) was a far better military strategist than any Roman. Despite inflicting a series of defeats on the Romans, culminating in the battle of Cannae (216 BC), he was ultimately defeated by Roman resilience and its huge reserves of manpower.



### Pompey the Great

(106–48 BC)

During 67–63 BC, Pompey's campaigns throughout the eastern Mediterranean laid the foundation for Roman control and organisation of the east. He was subsequently defeated by Julius Caesar in the civil war.



### Julius Caesar

(100–44 BC)

During the period 59–49 BC Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, immensely enriching himself and his men at the cost of much devastation. His commentaries on his campaigns became a model for the self-justificatory memoirs of all subsequent generals.



### Augustus (63BC-AD14)

The first Roman emperor, Augustus added Egypt, part of Spain and much of the Danube region to the empire. He laid down the system for administering the Roman Empire that lasted through the coming centuries. He controlled the armies and, in effect, could direct all other officials.



### Hadrian (AD 76–138)

He chose not to stay in Rome but to carry out tours of the provinces. He created the first permanent physical barriers, including the German Limes (frontier) and the eponymous wall in the north of England. He came from a Spanish provincial family but his love of all things Greek had a profound influence on the cultural development of the empire.

At the end of the first century BC, the poet Virgil, in his great poem *The Aeneid*, proclaimed in ringing, self-confident tones the Romans' unique contribution to history: "Remember, Roman, that your task is to rule peoples. These will be your particular skills: to impose the custom of peace, to show mercy to the defeated and to crush the arrogant by war."

Approaching the entrance to the Roman forum, a contemporary could have read on inscriptions the long list of triumphs that started with Rome's legendary founder, Romulus, and stretched through the centuries – of the struggle to control Italy, the wars in the western Mediterranean against Carthage, and the takeover of the east from the Hellenistic rulers who succeeded Alexander the Great. In the first seven centuries of Rome's existence there were hardly any years when it was not fighting someone.

The reasons for this highly successful aggressive, militaristic expansion by Rome are complex. Underlying it all, though no Roman would admit it, was fear. For Romans, everyone else was a potential rival. Everyone had to be subjected to Rome's authority, for fear that otherwise they might seek to subject Rome to theirs. This was all expressed by the Latin word *imperium*, from

"For Romans, the ultimate accolade was the **award of a triumph** for victory over an enemy – but first they had to **find an enemy to fight**"

which we derive 'empire' and 'imperial'. In origin this was the legitimate authority granted to Rome's senior magistrates to give orders to anyone of lesser status, and to expect them to be obeyed. Romans demanded that the authority of their magistrates was respected by everyone they encountered – not just by Roman citizens or by the inhabitants of the provinces directly controlled by the governors sent out annually by Rome.

### The terms of freedom

For example, when Rome defeated Philip V of Macedon in 197 BC to avenge his backing of Carthage in the Hannibalic war, it declared his Greek subjects to be free. However, when the Aetolians in Greece chose to pursue an

independent foreign policy, Rome taught them what freedom meant: they were attacked, defeated and subjected to a new treaty which specified that they were free "to preserve without deceit the *imperium* and majesty of the Roman People". On the other hand, Rome did not just wield a big stick: "We will always try to produce some benefit for those who place themselves in our care," Roman generals stated to a Greek city.

There were other drivers for Rome's imperialism. The Romans "seem to have been born with weapons in their hands", said the Jewish historian Josephus. The wealthy elite of Rome was predisposed to war. For them, the ultimate accolade was the award of a triumph for victory over an enemy – but first they had to find an enemy to fight.

The rewards were often enormous, in the form of booty for both the generals and the ordinary soldiers. The megalopolis of Rome itself, with its population of up to a million, could not have existed without the resources of the empire that were diverted to adorn and supply the city of Rome: corn from Sicily, North Africa and Egypt; gold and silver from Spain; and, above all, people from all over the world to replace those killed by disease in Rome's unhealthy urban environment.

Rome's empire was won by her armies. But the Roman soldier was not invincible. Rome's wars were littered with disasters and defeats.



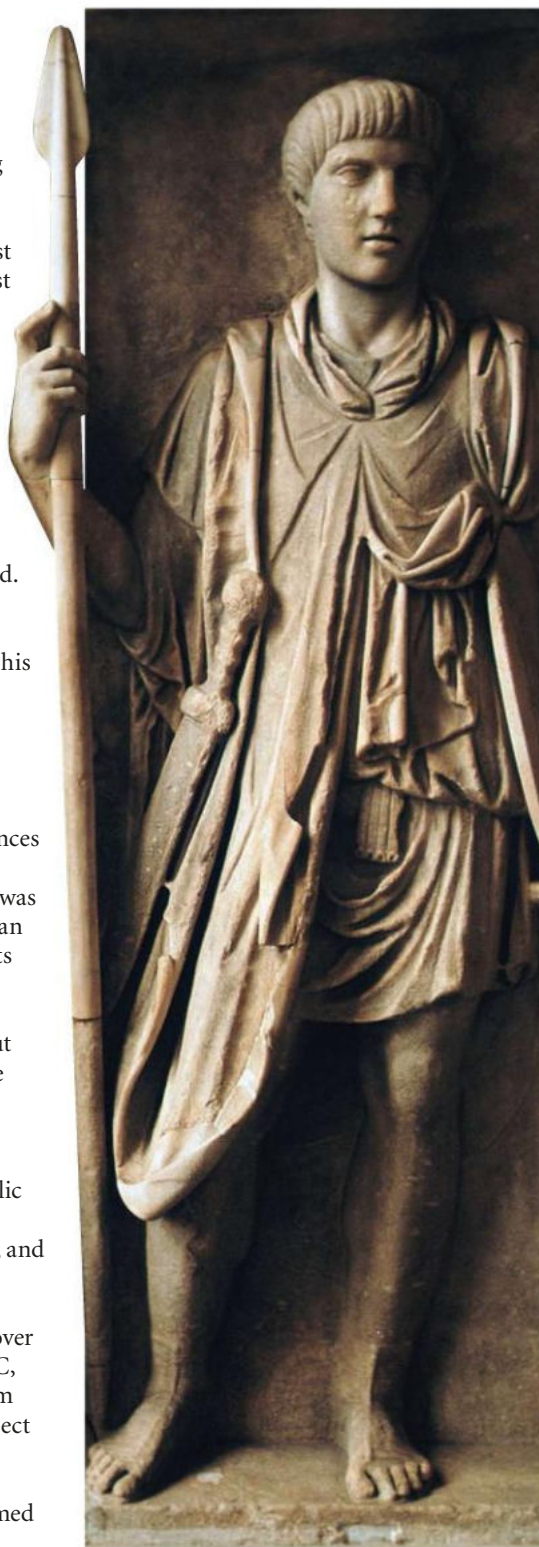
Hannibal, a far greater general than any produced by Rome, inflicted a series of crushing blows on Roman armies during his invasion of Italy, culminating in the disaster at Cannae, where the total of Roman dead far exceeded that for the first day of the battle of the Somme in the First World War. But, in the end, Hannibal lost the war. The reason was Rome's endless supply of troops from her allies. The acquisition of an empire in Italy and the Mediterranean gave Rome access to manpower that no-one else could hope to match.

There was a toughness and brutality about Rome's creation of her empire: cities were flattened, populations enslaved. Julius Caesar was reputed to have killed one million Gauls and enslaved another million. So his elegant commentaries on his campaigns in Gaul were, in reality, an account of genocide.

Nor did things necessarily get much better for many who found themselves a part of the Roman Empire. Corruption and extortion were endemic in the provinces during the Roman Republic. Of course, Romans themselves recognised that this was a problem. As the historian Livy noted: "an empire is most firmly established when its subjects are happy." But the Roman elite had little but contempt and suspicion of provincials, and the mechanisms they put in place for redress and punishment were half-hearted and often ineffective.

### Rise of the emperors

In the last century BC the Roman Republic collapsed in a series of civil wars during which the warlords (Pompey and Caesar, and later Antony and Augustus) drew on the resources and manpower of all of the provinces to aid them. After his victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BC, Augustus instituted a monarchical system that seemed to offer the longed-for prospect of peace. Given the dismal record of the Republic's management of the empire, it was no wonder that the provinces welcomed the rule of the Roman emperors.



**"Julius Caesar's commentaries on his campaigns in Gaul were, in reality, an account of genocide"**

**This relief depicts an auxiliary soldier. Such troops, mostly from non-Roman tribes throughout the empire, fought alongside the legions**

With Augustus's arrival, there was a general feeling that now 'somebody up there loves me.' Emperors played up to the image of being the caring father of their people. The emperor Tiberius restricted excessive taxation with the words: "it is the job of a good shepherd to shear his flock, not skin them."

Exploitation and corruption undoubtedly continued, but the excesses of the Republican period were restrained. Governors knew that their future – and, on occasion, their lives – depended on the emperor's good will. The provincials knew this as well, and were ever ready to send delegations to the emperor to complain against those officials they disliked.

This was not an empire held together simply by the fear of the military jackboot. Many inhabitants rarely saw units of Roman soldiers, which for the most part were stationed along the frontiers. The numbers of the Roman bureaucrats and officials were tiny. Rome recruited the local city elites to look after their own regions, to keep the peace and to collect the taxes.

The glue that held the empire together was an elaborate system of mutual favours. The subjects swore an oath of personal loyalty to the emperor, offered him cult as though he were a living god, and sent him expressions of their favour at key points in his reign. In return the Emperor honoured the local community with gifts, money, and privileges. Above all, what the emperors offered was peace, prosperity and participation.

GETTY IMAGES/LAMY

### TIMELINE ROMAN EMPIRE: GROWTH AND STABILITY



#### 753 BC

Rome is, according to legend, founded by the mythical Romulus, also reputedly the first Roman to have a triumph – a sign that the Romans saw themselves as militaristic from the start.

#### 264 BC

The first of three wars against Carthage, the leading power in the western Mediterranean, begins. The last one ends in 146 BC with the destruction of Carthage.

#### 200 BC

Rome is drawn into the Greek east in her war with Philip V of Macedon, the start of a takeover of the eastern Mediterranean, which culminates in the battle of Actium 31 BC.

#### 67–63 BC

Pompey defeats Mithridates, king of Pontus (roughly, Asia Minor), takes over Syria and Judaea, and reorganises the east.



The civil wars at the end of the Republic had engulfed the whole Roman world. When Augustus took over, peace, rather than war, became a key objective for the first time. It is true that he added more territory to the empire than any single individual before him; however, it can be argued that what he was looking for was somewhere to stop. Campaigns were expensive; the further territory to be gained was not of obvious benefit.

After Augustus, the main campaigns were undertaken by emperors who needed to enhance their military reputation – for example, Claudius's expedition in Britain. The view that Rome did not need to expand its direct control any further led to the creation of a frontier, of which Hadrian's Wall in the far north of England is only the most spectacular section. The wall, and indeed the rest of the frontier, should be seen less as a defensive system and more like a fence – it was a way to control movement across the borders of the empire.

### The peace dividend

Peace in the empire brought with it a prosperity dividend. People were able to exploit the opportunities of more secure long-distance trade. Taxation was low. The empire's inhabitants came to expect more goods and a better standard of living. For the first two centuries AD there was a period of real sustained economic growth, which would not be seen again on such a scale until the European Renaissance.

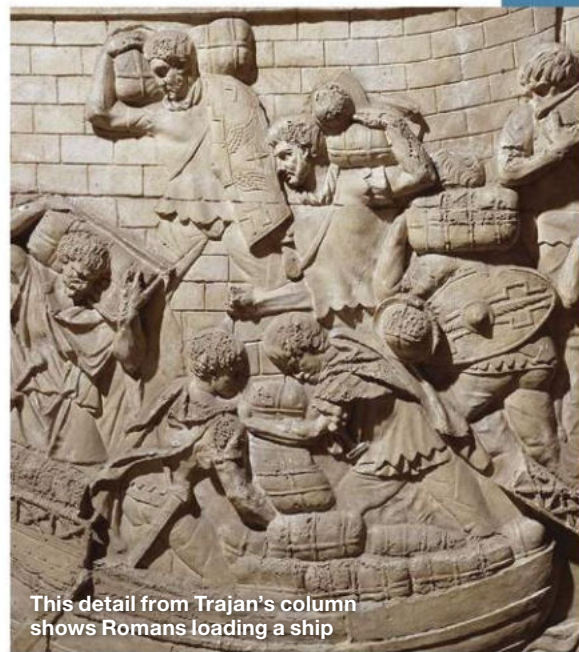
Finally, and most remarkably, Rome offered its subjects participation at all levels in the benefits of empire. In the late third century BC, Philip V of Macedon had noted Rome's remarkable liberality in letting slaves freed by Roman citizens have the same status. In the first century BC all of Italy gained citizenship and some people from the provinces were also rewarded with it.

Eventually, in AD 212, the emperor Caracalla was to grant citizenship to nearly all of the inhabitants of the empire. According to the historian Tacitus, a Roman general in the middle of the first century AD

could already point out to rebellious tribesmen: "Everything has been made accessible to all: you yourselves often command our legions, you yourselves govern these and other provinces. There are no barriers, no locked doors." He was telling the truth. Soon, members of provincial elites were to provide Rome with emperors: Trajan and Hadrian from Spain and, later, Septimius Severus from North Africa.

At its height in the second century AD, the Roman empire could be viewed as an impossible dream come true. It was a geographical monster that survived not because the Romans were uniquely able to defend its frontiers, but because those frontiers never came under persistent long-term pressure from outside. When they did, they crumbled in the west. But those who came sought not to destroy the empire but to claim their share of what, to them, was El Dorado. **H**

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This detail from Trajan's column shows Romans loading a ship

## OUR CHANGING VIEWS ON ROMAN IMPERIALISM

During the 19th-century era of imperialism, the Roman empire was often seen as a model, particularly by the British. The Romans did not represent themselves as aggressors in any of their wars; they had elaborate rituals for ensuring that the gods recognised that Rome was always the aggrieved party. Hence the Romans were painted as **defensive or reluctant imperialists**.

In his enormously influential book of 1979, however, William Harris argued the case for Roman imperialism being **driven by militarism**, by the Roman elite's search for **personal fame**, and by the prospect of **huge financial gains**.

Subsequent debate has produced a more balanced picture. Economic motives for conquest have been played down, though the **economic consequences of empire were enormous** and vital, for example, for the growth of the city of Rome.

Further, there are few indications of conscious imperial policies. The growth and maintenance of empire frequently depended on the personal decisions of individual generals or emperors. We now understand much better how Roman

emperors ran a huge empire with a tiny administration by enlisting the **support of local elites** to carry out the work on Rome's behalf.

It has been suggested that Rome's **organisation of areas as provinces** in itself stimulated economic activity as provincials sought to find extra income to pay the new taxation. Whether the undoubted great increase in economic activity led to real growth is still debated, but it is likely. The process of Romanisation of the provinces is now seen not as a conscious Roman policy but as the **adoption of desirable aspects of Graeco-Roman culture** by indigenous peoples. The Roman empire remained a patchwork quilt of languages, customs, and practices.

**59-49 BC**  
**Julius Caesar conquers Gaul.**

**31 BC**  
Octavian (later called Augustus) **defeats Antony and Cleopatra at Actium**. As emperor, Augustus reorganises the system of administration of the Roman Empire.

**AD 43**  
**Emperor Claudius invades Britain.**



**AD 101-106**  
**Emperor Trajan conquers Dacia** beyond the Danube. His victory is recorded on a column erected in Rome in AD 113.

**AD 122**  
**Emperor Hadrian supervises the creation of a wall** as the frontier in northern Britain "to separate the Romans from the barbarians". This becomes part of a huge frontier system right round the Roman world.

**AD 212**  
**The emperor Caracalla grants citizenship** to almost all inhabitants of the Roman Empire.



# At home with the Romans

We know how they waged wars and ran an empire. But what did Romans get up to in the privacy of their own abodes? **Paul Roberts** takes us on a guided tour of the bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens of ordinary citizens

In AD 79 a catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius on the Bay of Naples destroyed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Pompeii was smothered by 4 to 5 metres of volcanic debris while Herculaneum was entombed in 20 metres of volcanic ash that hardened into tufa rock.

After the eruption Pompeii was ransacked; the memory of the cities then faded, resurfacing only in the 18th century. Herculaneum was first excavated in 1709, buried so deeply that the only way to gain access was by tunnelling. Over the next 40 years a warren of tunnels was burrowed through the site, yielding amazing discoveries including wooden objects, foodstuffs, a papyrus library and many marble and bronze statues.

In 1748 excavations began at Pompeii, which was buried less deeply, so far easier to excavate. In contrast to Herculaneum's gloomy tunnels, tourists could walk along Pompeii's streets and explore houses and public buildings in the light and air.

Pompeii was four times the size of Herculaneum, covering almost 66 hectares (163 acres) and with a population of 12,000–15,000 people, compared with 4,000–5,000 in


Herculaneum. Pompeii was also busier, with administrative, financial and commercial interests of regional importance. There were slaves, merchants and soldiers from other parts of the Roman empire. The rich were easy to spot by their fine clothing and accompanying servants. Slaves and the free poor were readily recognisable by appearance, such as the simple short tunics that they wore, indicating menial or manual occupations. It was a young population, with most people in their 20s to 40s; one in five of the inhabitants was aged under 10.

Another feature of the human landscape was the visible presence of women. In streets, shops and public areas, women mingled freely with men – unthinkable in some other cultures – and they played a prominent role in the running of the home. Even more surprising was the huge number of ex-slaves – perhaps over half of the population.

Though Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed in an extraordinary way, they were ordinary cities, representative of many others. And it is this very ordinariness that makes them so important, because they give us an unparalleled glimpse into life in the average Roman home.







A Pompeian wall painting from the first century AD shows ladies with their slave hairdresser. Excavations at the partially buried Roman city reveal that women played a prominent role in the home, and that they took personal grooming very seriously indeed



## Bricks and mortar

Some Romans loved to flaunt their wealth and status through the grandeur of their homes

Roman homes varied from single-roomed apartments to multi-chambered mansions.

The classic house – the rectangular, two-storeyed *domus* – was made of bricks and mortar with a tiled roof. Typical spaces in larger homes included the entrance hall (*atrium*), anteroom/study (*tablinum*), bedrooms (*cubicula*), the dining room (*triclinium*) and the garden (*hortus*).

Larger, older houses had a masonry frontage with architectural details, or moulded stucco imitating masonry. Great doors

decorated with bronze bosses spoke of wealth and status, but windows were small, with metal grilles covered by shutters or sliding wooden panels.

The *domus* housed master and household but others lived over and around it. Shops often fronted the house. Above these, and in other parts of the upper storey, were apartments with balconies and extensions (*maeniana*) jutting over the street. These were made of *opus craticium* – a light but strong structure of timber frame and rubble.



Larger Roman homes boasted a dining room (*triclinium*) like this first-century AD example discovered in Herculaneum

## The extended family

A posse of slaves was an essential cog in the well-run Roman household

Each *domus* housed a *familia*. This Latin word meant more than simply 'family' – it signified a household of people linked by blood and marriage. This included the *dominus*, his wife and their children, but also members of the extended family as well as slaves and ex-slaves (freedmen). Larger households probably contained dozens of people, with a high proportion of slaves and freedmen.

Slaves were indispensable to daily life. Some were acquired through auctions, while others, *vernae*, were born to slaves in the home and were brought up there.

Slaves benefited from belonging to the household, and probably enjoyed more comfortable lives than many poorer freeborn citizens. Some slaves had particular skills, such as cooking, hairdressing or gardening, but many worked generally at whatever was required. They bustled in and about, tending to the household's daily needs.

Women were an integral part of all areas of the home – which was certainly not the case in every ancient culture. The writer Cornelius Nepos wrote that "*Matrona versatur in medio*" ("The lady of the house is at the centre of things.") From the wet-nurse in the *cubiculum* and the maid weaving in the *atrium* to the cook in the kitchen, the same was true for all women in the home.



## Snails and stuffed dormice

While the kitchens of the poor served up mundane fare, the cuisine of the wealthy was far more exotic

Roman dining varied hugely – from fine meals in a grand house to pies in a tavern or snacks in a small flat.

Romans ate breakfast (*ientaculum*) of bread, cheese and olives; lunch (*prandium*), eaten at midday, possibly included meat, again with bread and vegetables. They sat down to dinner (*cena*) at around 6 or 7pm, a grand occasion in wealthy homes. The rich reclined on couches in the *triclinium* (in Greek, room 'of the three couches'), while slaves served exotic food and wine with vessels of silver.

Slaves did all cooking in kitchens (*culinae*) which, even in wealthy houses, were small, dark, smoky and smelly. Many also housed the toilet. Food was

cooked on a solid masonry structure using terracotta and bronze pans, cooking pots, jars and casseroles.

*Cena* comprised three elements. Appetisers (*gustatio*) included eggs, snails, fish and seafood, vegetables and cheese. There were also dormice, served stuffed with pork mince, dormouse meat, pepper, pine nuts and garum (fish sauce) and cooked under a *clibanus*, a two-part domed terracotta baking/roasting pot. Main course (*mensae primae*) was meat – kid and goat, pig meat of all types, prepared meats, game and poultry. Dessert (*mensae secundae*) consisted of fruit, nuts and pastries.

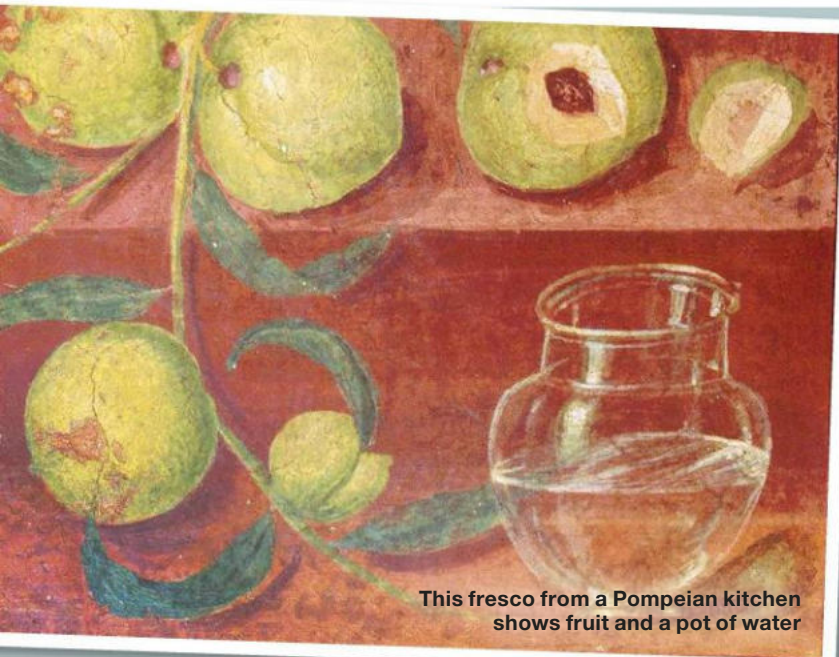
The less wealthy sat at tables and used

vessels of pottery and glass. Graffiti from Pompeii shows monotonous diets of bread, oil, leeks, onions and cheese, with fish and sausages as treats. But excavations of a drain in Herculaneum that served both poor and rich houses produced vegetables, including beans, olives and lentils, together with fruits and nuts such as fig, date, apple and grape and hazelnut.

Seafood eaten included scallops, mussels and sea urchins alongside fish such as sardines, eels and anchovies. Chicken, sheep and pig bones were also found, as were seeds of dill, coriander, mint and black peppercorn (imported from India) – an echo of rich sauces.



This fresco painting in the house of Marcus Lucretius Fronto depicts a domestic scene in Pompeii



This fresco from a Pompeian kitchen shows fruit and a pot of water

Painted plaster from first-century AD Pompeii shows a baker distributing bread



## Cottage industries

Many Pompeians ran businesses from home – and some made a fortune in the process

Some homes hosted businesses. Many shops, workshops and bars were built into the fronts of even the wealthiest houses, and clearly no stigma was attached to commercial premises. These are instantly recognisable by their wide entrances, masonry counters with inset jars, and staircases leading up to living quarters. Businesses were a useful source of income to homeowners through takings and rents, but were run by slaves and freedmen.

Shops sold local foodstuffs and goods, often made on the premises, as well as merchandise from all over the empire, including luxuries such as silk, perfumes and spices, lamps and glass vessels.

Businessmen could make massive fortunes. One man who did just that was the fish sauce magnate Aulus Umbricius Scaurus, owner of a mansion in western Pompeii, who inlaid mosaics depicting bottles of his fish sauce into his floor.

BRIDGEMAN/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



## What went on in the bedroom...

The Romans' idea of appropriate sexual imagery was very different from our own

Rich and poor homes alike provided opportunities to relax and unwind. Families sat and talked, read, played games, dined, drank and made music. For resting or sleeping, people retired to the bedroom (*cubiculum*), a small room that sometimes incorporated alcoves or floor patterning – indicating the positions of beds – or recesses for a bed end or clothes chest.

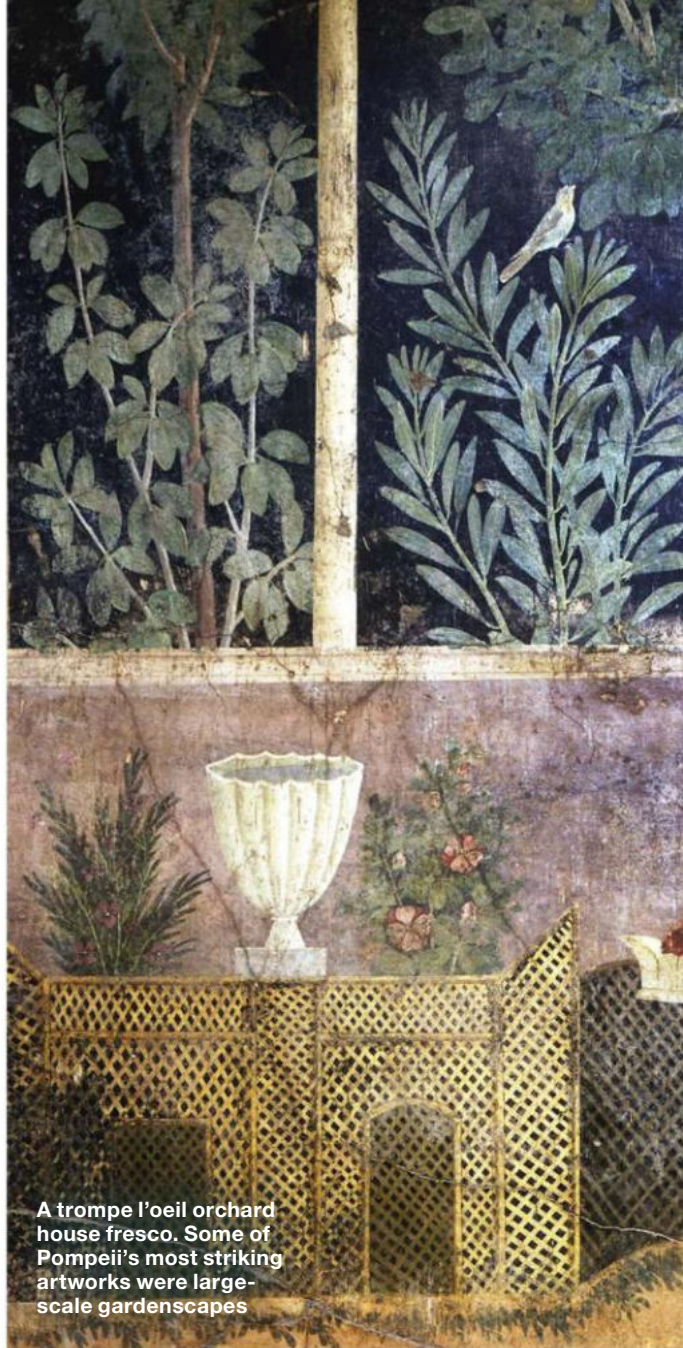
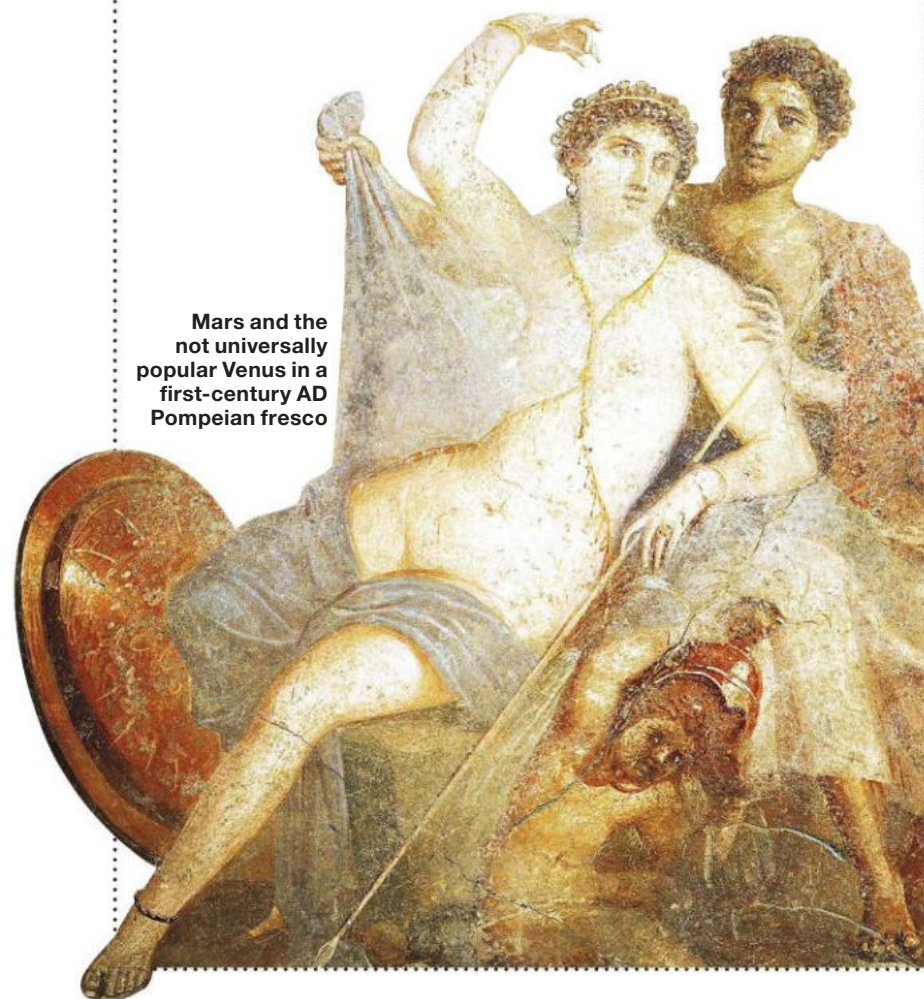
The bedroom was regarded as an appropriate place for love and sex. The Romans were fairly comfortable with nudity and sexual images, and considered the phallus a lucky charm. Many frescoes show couples making love, and some were found on open display in gardens rather than in bedrooms or brothels. Slaves are frequently present in these scenes, reflecting the Romans' very different ideas of

privacy. More disturbingly, it reminds us that some slaves were unwilling participants rather than mere attendants.

In addition to these explicit depictions of human sex and love, there were representations of the gods and other supernatural beings who influenced the love lives of mortals, such as Bacchus and his followers. Venus, goddess of love and beauty (and patroness of Pompeii), ruled the hearts of gods and men – but not always happily. "I want to break Venus's ribs with sticks," scribbled one unlucky-in-love Pompeian.

*Cubicula* were generally dark, so were lit by oil lamps of terracotta and bronze. The writer Martial gives a voice to such a lamp: "I'm the nice lamp who knows all about your bed – do what you fancy – I won't say a word."

Mars and the not universally popular Venus in a first-century AD Pompeian fresco



A trompe l'oeil orchard house fresco. Some of Pompeii's most striking artworks were large-scale gardenscapes

## Beauty and the beasts

Pompeians took their interior design very seriously, as the finest Roman frescoes ever discovered prove

Roman decorative styles changed through circumstance and fashion, and the chronological and stylistic diversity found in the cities is important.

Poor homes, smaller apartments and rooms such as kitchens and toilets had plain or simply painted walls and floors of beaten earth or tile and concrete. In wealthy homes most rooms were finely decorated in a unity of floor, walls and ceiling.

Plasterers, painters and mosaicists collaborated in workshops (*officinae*). Recurring pictures and motifs indicate that they worked from copybooks or catalogues.

Floors were of crushed brick and tile in mortar (*signinum*), or of mosaic, patterned surfaces made of small cubes (*tesserae*) of stone and glass. A detailed mosaic panel (*emblema*) was an indicator of greater





refinement. Ceilings of plaster or coffered wood were brightly painted.

Walls could be decorated with wall mosaics, marble veneering or decorative panels, but wall paintings (frescoes) were the main feature, painted onto plaster that was wet or 'fresh' (*fresco* in Italian). Pompeii's frescoes, the finest and most numerous examples in the Roman world, are divided into four 'Pompeian styles'.

The first style, imported from the Greeks, used moulded, brightly painted plaster to imitate marble veneer. The second, home-grown style

incorporated painted simulations of sculpture, and architecture in false perspective.

The third style featured blocks of colour with central Greek mythological scenes. The fourth flanked these scenes with winged figures or roundels of still life and portraits. In vogue in AD 79, this style was the most common, partly due to demand from nouveau riche freedmen for fine domestic interiors.

But the most striking frescoes ignored styles and filled walls with large-scale scenes of beast hunts or beautiful gardenscapes.

## A lotion of lupin and broad beans

A lack of running water was no obstacle to looking good and smelling great

Most people went to the public baths only once or twice a week. What about other days? Rooms had no running water, even in wealthy houses, so people washed in the bedroom using a basin of water, heated, if necessary, in the kitchen. In this period, most Roman men were clean-shaven and wore their hair short. This was done at home by a slave or outside by a barber (*tonsor*), using a distinctive folding razor called a *novacula* and one-piece shears.

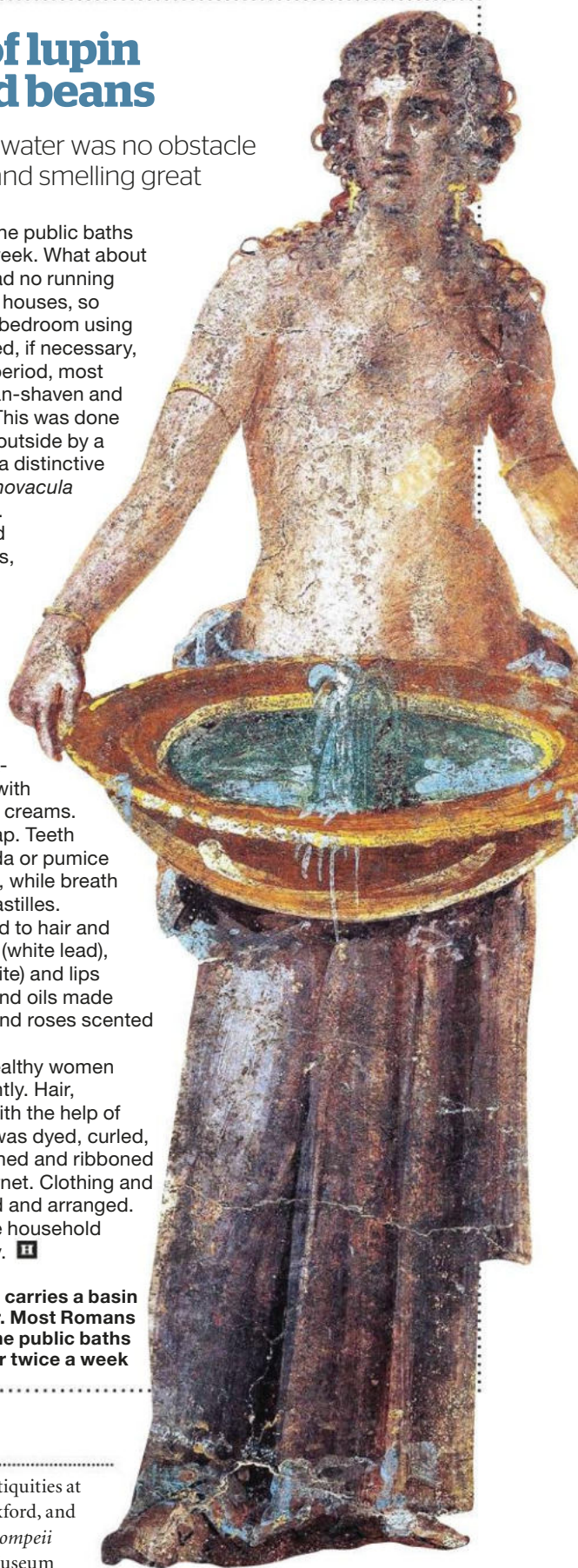
Women washed and cleansed with sponges, cloth and abrasive cleansers such as pumice. Among skin lotions and softeners was a cream of broad beans, lupins and wine that made the skin 'smoother than a mirror'. Unwanted hair was removed with tweezers (*voSELLae*) or creams. Olive oil served as soap. Teeth were cleaned with soda or pumice using fingers or sticks, while breath was freshened with pastilles.

Attention now turned to hair and make-up – for cheeks (white lead), eyes (crocus and azurite) and lips (red lead). Perfumes and oils made with violets, jasmine and roses scented body and hair.

The hairstyles of wealthy women changed fairly frequently. Hair, sometimes dressed with the help of a hair slave (*ornatrix*) was dyed, curled, ringletted, waved, pinned and ribboned or arranged into a hairnet. Clothing and jewellery were donned and arranged.

The members of the household were ready for the day. **II**

**A Pompeian carries a basin of water. Most Romans visited the public baths only once or twice a week**



Paul Roberts is keeper of antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and author of *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (British Museum Press, 2013)



# ROME AFTER DARK



Join **Mary Beard** on a no-holds-barred tour of the imperial capital after sunset, when armed muggers, drunken toffs and flying chamber pots were among the many hazards facing those braving the mean streets

**A**ncient Rome after dark was a dangerous place. Most of us can easily imagine wandering the bright spaces among the shining marble of the imperial city on a sunny day – that's usually what movies and novels show us, not to mention the history books. But what happened when night fell? More to the point, what was life at night like for the vast

majority of the population of Rome, who lived in the over-crowded high-rise apartments, not in the spacious mansions of the rich?

Remember that, by the first century BC (the time of Julius Caesar), Rome was a city of a million inhabitants – rich and poor, slaves and ex-slaves, free and foreign. It was the world's first multicultural metropolis, complete with slums, multiple-occupancy tenements and sink estates – all of which we

tend to forget when we concentrate on its great colonnades and plazas. So what was backstreet Rome – the real city – like after the lights went out? Can we possibly recapture it?

The best place to start is the satire of that grumpy old Roman man, Juvenal, who conjured up a nasty picture of daily life in Rome around AD 100. The inspiration behind every satirist from Dr Johnson to



Figures from a relief adorning Rome's Arch of Constantine, sculpted in the second century AD. People without the benefit of security guards would have been wary on streets at night





## “It was the world’s first multicultural metropolis, complete with sink estates”

Stephen Fry, Juvenal reminds us of the dangers of walking around the streets after dark. There was the waste (that is, chamber pot plus contents) that might come down on your head from the upper floors, not to mention the toffs – blokes in scarlet cloaks, with a whole retinue of hangers-on – who might bump into you on your way through town, and rudely push you out of the way:

“And now think of the different and diverse perils of the night. See what a height it is to that towering roof from which a pot comes crack upon my head every time that some broken or leaky vessel is pitched out of the window! See with what a smash it strikes and dints the pavement! There’s death in every open window as you pass along at night; you may well be deemed a fool, improvident of sudden accident, if you go out to dinner without having made your will... Yet, however reckless the fellow may be, however hot with wine and young blood, he gives a wide berth to one whose scarlet cloak and long retinue of attendants, with torches and brass lamps in their hands, bid him keep his distance. But to me, who am wont to be escorted home by the moon, or by the scant light of a candle he pays no respect.” (So wrote Juvenal in his *Satire 3*.)

### Toffs and robbers

Juvenal himself was actually pretty rich. All Roman poets were relatively well heeled (the leisure you needed for writing poetry required money, even if you pretended to be poor). His self-presentation as a ‘man of the people’ was a bit of a journalistic facade. But how accurate was his nightmare vision of Rome at night? Was it really a place where chamber pots crashed on your head, the rich and powerful stamped all over you, and (as Juvenal observes elsewhere) you risked being mugged and robbed by any group of thugs that came along?

Probably, yes.

Outside the splendid civic centre, Rome was a place of narrow alleyways, a labyrinth of lanes and passageways. There was no street lighting, nowhere to throw your excrement and no police force.

After dark, ancient Rome must have been a threatening place. Most rich people, I’m sure, didn’t go out – at least, not without their private security team of slaves or their “long



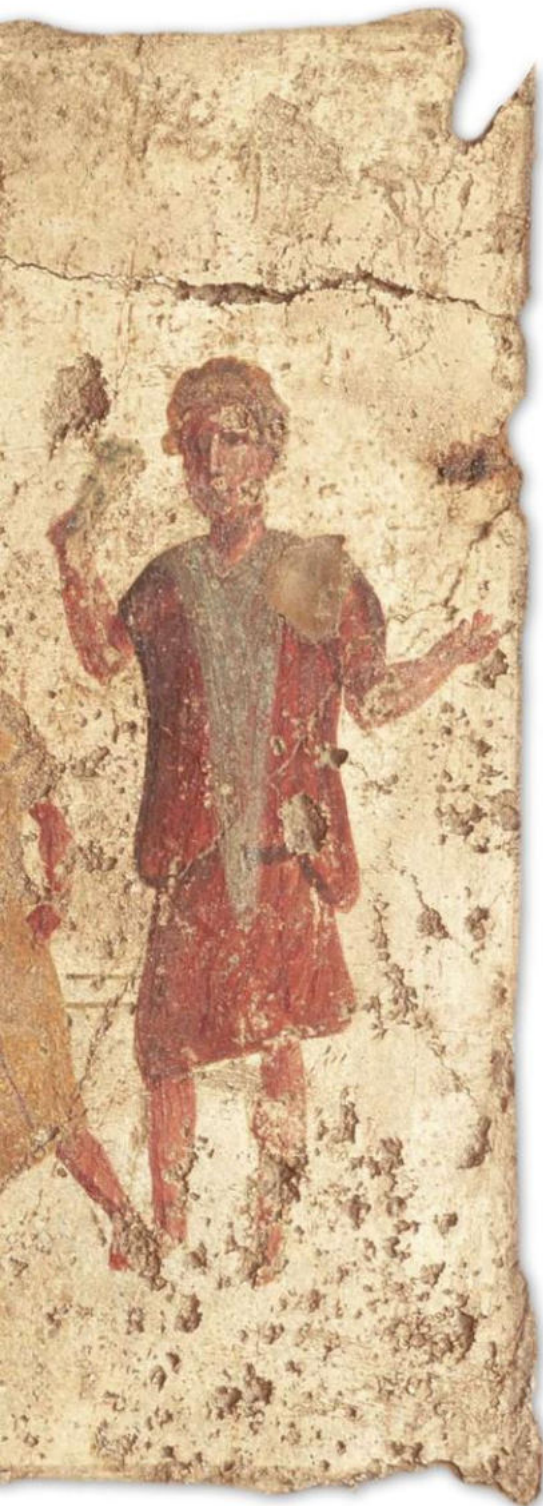
A fresco painting of game players in a tavern on the Via di Mercurio in Pompeii

retinue of attendants” – and the only public protection you could hope for was the paramilitary force of the night watch, the *vigiles*. Exactly what these watchmen did, and how effective they were, is a moot point. They were split into battalions across the city and their main job was to look out for fires breaking out (a frequent occurrence in the jerry-built tenement blocks, with open braziers burning on the top floors). But they had little equipment to deal with a major outbreak, beyond a small supply of vinegar

and a few blankets to douse the flames, and poles to pull down neighbouring buildings to make a fire break.

Sometimes these men were heroes. In fact, a touching memorial survives to a soldier acting as a night watchman at Ostia, Rome’s port. He had tried to rescue people stranded in a fire, died in the process and was given a burial at public expense. But they weren’t always so altruistic. One story of the great fire of Rome in AD 64 was that the *vigiles* actually joined in the looting of the city while it





The remains of a tavern in the Roman port town of Ostia

## Night vision

Where to see ancient Rome's bars, streets and houses today

If you want to get an impression of a real Roman street, one place is in the very centre of the city. Just at the bottom of the Capitoline Hill, from where you now ascend the steps to the Capitoline Museums, was a Roman tenement block. Most tourists walk by without looking, but it's still there, standing over three floors high. Look down over the fence and you'll see the ancient street a few metres below the modern... you'll easily get the idea of what a dark, dirty and gloomy alleyway it must have been.

A little bit more off the beaten track are the Roman houses and street still visible

underneath the church of SS Giovanni e Paolo, recently beautifully restored and open to the public. You enter from the street known as 'Clivo di Scauro' between the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus.

Anyone wandering through Pompeii or the ruins at the Roman port town of Ostia (easily reachable by train from central Rome) will see the bars, with their counters facing onto the street and seating areas inside offering a venue for a more leisurely drink. Sadly, the painting of the landlord telling off his rowdy clients (described on page 72) is in storage in the Naples Museum, not on display.

burned. The firemen had inside knowledge of where to go and where the rich pickings were.

Certainly the *vigiles* were not police, and had little authority when petty crimes at night escalated into something much bigger. They might well give a young offender a clip round the ear. But did they do more than that? There wasn't much they could do, and mostly they weren't around, anyway.

If you were a victim of crime, it was a case of self-help – as one particularly tricky case discussed in an ancient handbook on Roman

law proves. The case concerns a shopkeeper who kept his business open at night and left a lamp on the counter, which faced onto the street. A man came down the street and pinched the lamp; the man in the shop went after him, and a brawl ensued. The thief was carrying a weapon – a piece of rope with a lump of metal at the end – and he coshed the shopkeeper, who retaliated and knocked out the eye of the thief.

This presented Roman lawyers with a tricky question: was the shopkeeper liable for the

injury? In a debate that echoes some of our own dilemmas about how far a property owner should go in defending himself against a burglar, the lawyers decided that, because the thief had been armed with a nasty piece of metal and had struck the first blow, he had to take responsibility for the loss of his eye.

But wherever the buck stopped (and not many cases like this would ever have come to court, except in the imagination of some academic Roman lawyers), the incident is a good example for us of what could happen





**Mary Beard reveals that the streets of Pompeii and ancient Rome were full of danger once the sun set**

to you on the streets of Rome after dark, where petty crime could soon turn into a brawl that left someone half-blind.

And such problems weren't confined to Rome itself. One case from a town on the west coast of what's now Turkey, at the turn of the first centuries BC and AD, came to the attention of the emperor Augustus himself. There had been a series of night-time scuffles between some wealthy householders and a gang that was attacking their house. (Whether they were some young thugs who deserved the ancient equivalent of an ASBO, or a group of political rivals trying to unsettle their enemies, we have no clue.) Finally, one of the slaves inside the house, who was presumably trying to empty a pile of excrement from a chamber pot onto the head of one of the raiders, actually let the pot fall – and the marauder was mortally injured.

The case, and the question of where guilt for the death lay, was obviously so tricky that it went all the way up to the emperor himself, who decided (presumably on 'self-defence' grounds) to exonerate the householders under attack. It was presumably those householders who had the emperor's judgment inscribed on stone and put on display back home. But, for all the slightly puzzling details of the case, it's another nice illustration that the streets of the Roman world could be dangerous after dark – and that Juvenal might not have been wrong about those falling chamber pots.

### Nocturnal antics

Night-time Rome wasn't just dangerous. There was also fun to be had in the clubs, taverns and bars late at night. You might live in a cramped flat in a high-rise block but, for men at least, there were places to go to drink, to gamble and (let's be honest) to flirt with the barmaids.

The Roman elite were pretty snuffy about these places. Gambling was a favourite

common activity throughout Roman society. The emperor Claudius was even said to have written a handbook on the subject. But, of course, this didn't prevent the upper classes from decrying the bad habits of the poor and their addiction to games of chance. One snobbish Roman writer even complained about the nasty snorting noises that you would hear late at night in a Roman bar – the noises that resulted from a combination of snotty noses and intense concentration on the board game in question.


Happily, though, we do have a few glimpses into the fun of the Roman bar from the point of view of the ordinary users themselves. That is, we can still see some of the paintings that decorated the walls of the slightly seedy bars of Pompeii – showing typical scenes of bar life. These focus on the pleasures of drink (we see groups of men sitting around bar tables, ordering another round from the waitress), we see flirtation (and more) going on between customers and barmaids, and we see a good deal of board gaming.

Interestingly, even from this bottom-up perspective, there is a hint of violence. In the paintings from one Pompeian bar (now in the Archaeological Museum at Naples), the final scene in a series shows a couple of gamblers having a row over the game, and the landlord being reduced to threatening to throw his customers out. In a speech bubble coming out of the landlord's mouth, he is saying (as landlords always have): "Look, if you want

**A man refills his cup from a wine cask in this first-century AD Roman relief**







## “Rome’s mean streets were where you could find the emperor Nero on his evenings off”

a fight, guys, take it outside.”

So where were the rich while this edgy nocturnal activity was going on in the streets? Well, most of them were comfortably tucked up in their beds, in their plush houses, guarded by slaves and guard dogs. Those mosaics in the forecourts of the houses of Pompeii showing fierce canines and branded *Cave Canem* (‘Beware of the Dog’) are probably a good guide to what you would have found greeting you if you had tried to get into one of these places. Inside the doors, peace reigned (unless the place was being attacked, of course!), and the rough life of the streets was barely audible. But there is an irony here. Perhaps it isn’t surprising that some of the Roman rich, who ought to have been tucked up in bed in their mansions, thought that the life of the street was extremely exciting in comparison with their own. And – never mind all those snobbish sneers about the snorting of the bar gamblers – that’s exactly where they wanted to be.

Rome’s mean streets were where you could apparently find the emperor Nero on his evenings off. After dark, so his biographer Suetonius tells us, he would disguise himself with a cap and wig, visit the city bars and roam around the streets, running riot with his mates. When he met men making their way home after dinner, he’d beat them up; he’d even break into closed shops, steal some of the stock and sell it in the palace. He would get into brawls – and apparently often ran the risk of having an eye put out (like the thief with the lamp), or even of ending up dead.

So while many of the city’s richest residents would have avoided the streets of Rome after dark at all costs – or only ventured out accompanied by a security guard – others would not just be pushing innocent pedestrians out of the way, they’d be prowling around, giving a very good pretence of being muggers. And, if Suetonius is to be believed, the last person you’d want to bump into late at night in downtown Rome would be the notorious emperor Nero. ■

Covered passages lead from the Palatine Hill, one of the most ancient areas of Rome. Would you risk these dark alleys at night?

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# RECONSTRUCTING THE GLADIATOR

Hollywood likes to cast them as heroic freedom fighters, but how did Rome's arena-warriors really live and die? **Tony Wilmott** investigates





Reliefs from the first century AD show gladiators in the arena. The most successful could earn fame, if not fortune, but few would survive more than a dozen fights

In 1993, Austrian archaeologists working at the Roman city of Ephesus in Turkey made a spectacular discovery – a cemetery marked by the tombstones of gladiators. The stones gave the names of the men and showed their equipment – helmets, shields, the palm fronds of victory. With the tombstones lay the skeletal remains of the fighters themselves, many of which bore the marks of healed wounds as well as the injuries that caused their deaths. Perhaps the most spectacular find was a skull pierced with three neat, evenly spaced holes. This man had been slain with the barbed trident wielded by a type of gladiator called a *retiarius*, who also fought with a weighted net.

The gladiator has long been an iconic symbol of ancient Rome, and a popular element in any Roman epic movie, but what do we really know about the lives and deaths of these men?

Until the 18th-century discovery of the cities destroyed by Vesuvius, virtually everything we knew about gladiators came from references in ancient texts, from random finds of stone sculptures and inscriptions, and from the impressive structures of the amphitheatres dotted about all over the Roman empire.

It is difficult now to quite comprehend the impact that the discovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum had on the classically educated of Europe, who suddenly saw the reality of Roman lives in a bewildering array of objects, graffiti and paintings.

The reality could be spectacular, and in some cases seemed to confirm the more lurid stories in the sources. Discoveries made at the temple of Isis at Pompeii in 1764 confirmed the practise of mysterious and esoteric eastern religions. Two years later, in rooms around the courtyard of Pompeii's theatre, a number of skeletons were found together with a large quantity of gladiatorial armour, identifying the rooms as a gladiator barracks. Among the dead was a woman adorned with bracelets, rings and an emerald necklace.

This discovery has since become part of the mythology not only of Pompeii but also of the arena. At the time, it seemed to confirm scandalous stories in ancient sources of wealthy and aristocratic women enjoying sexual adventures with brawny gladiators – though we now interpret the 18 skeletons in this room as a group of frightened fugitives sheltering from the disaster of the volcanic eruption.

From the point of view of reconstructing the gladiator, the most important discovery was the bronze gladiatorial armour and weaponry. This included 15 helmets richly ornamented with mythological scenes, and

six examples of the curious shoulder guard known as a *galerus*.

Gladiators were divided into categories – each armed and attired in a characteristic manner – and were pitched against one another in pairings designed to show a variety of forms of combat. Each different type of equipment provided varying levels of protection to the body, deliberately giving the opponent the opportunity to aim for specific points of vulnerability.

All gladiator categories wore a basic *subligaculum* (loincloth) and *balteus* (broad belt). Among the most heavily armed gladiators were the *thraex* (Thracian) and the *hoplomachus* (inspired by Greek hoplite soldiers). Both wore padded leg-guards with bronze greaves (a form of armour) strapped over them; 14 such greaves were found in Pompeii. Each of these fighters carried a small shield: rectangular for the *thraex*, who was armed with a short, curved sword; round for the *hoplomachus*, who carried a spear and short sword. Both wore a padded arm-guard or *manica*, but only on the arm wielding the sword or spear. The shield arm was unprotected, as was the torso.

The *thraex* and *hoplomachus* wore heavy bronze helmets of the type found in Pompeii.

“Stories told of aristocratic women enjoying sexual adventures with brawny gladiators”



The tombstone of a *murmillo* gladiator, holding the palm of victory. His helmet lies beside him on the ground





A gladiator's helmet found in Pompeii. Breathing in these helmets wouldn't have been easy, because the wearer was forced to inhale the air trapped in the face guard



The skull of one of the 68 gladiators' skeletons found in Ephesus in 1993. The bones unearthed suggest that a fighter usually died from a single large wound – the kind inflicted by a coup de grâce – rather than numerous smaller ones



Bronze greaves discovered at Pompeii's gladiator barracks. The discovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum transformed our knowledge of ancient Rome, and of the lives of its arena-warriors

These helmets had broad brims, high crests and face guards. Visibility was limited to what the wearer could see through a pair of bronze grilles.

As gladiatorial re-enactors have discovered, breathing in these helmets isn't easy; the wearer is forced to inhale the air trapped in the face guard. Factor in fear and exertion – which would inevitably shorten the breath anyway – and you can imagine that it must have been a lung-busting experience.

Another type of gladiator to wear a large helmet and carry a short sword was the *murmilllo*. He was also armed with a large rectangular shield, used to defend his legs. He wore armour on only one leg, though the leg on the shield side was protected with padding and greave.

Two other gladiators – the *provocator* and *secutor* – also fought with one vulnerable leg, and wore a *manica* only on the weapon-bearing arm. They also carried a short sword and large shield, but wore lighter helmets than the *thraex*, *hoplomachus* and *murmilllo*.

The *secutor's* helmet fitted close to his head. Visibility was restricted to two small eye-holes, and there was no decoration. The helmet was shaped like the head of a fish – for the simple reason that the *secutor's* opponent, the *retiarius*, was equipped as a fisherman.

The *retiarius* is perhaps the most extraordinary of all the gladiator classes, and his equipment shows most clearly the carefully choreographed balance between strength and vulnerability that ensured a degree of fairness and balance in gladiatorial combat.

The *retiarius* was almost wholly unprotected. If he was right-handed, his left arm would be protected by a padded *manica*, and on his left shoulder would be strapped a high shoulder-guard, the *galerus*. An example of a *galerus* found in the Pompeii barracks was decorated with a dolphin, a trident, a crab and the anchor and rudder of a ship.

The *retiarius* wore no helmet, and he was armed with a long-handled trident, a short knife and a lead-weighted net or *rete*, after which he was named. The net could be used as a flail, but it is clear that the job of the *retiarius* was to throw the net over his opponent, catching the fish-like *secutor* then dispatching him with the trident.

Once he'd thrown the net, the *retiarius* could use the trident as a pole arm. This was when the *galerus* came into play: when using the trident two-handed, the left shoulder would be forward and the *galerus* would have proved an effective head-guard.

One tomb relief of a *retiarius* from Romania shows him holding what seems to be a four-bladed knife. The use of this weapon remained a mystery until archaeologists discovered a femur at the Ephesus cemetery





A *retiarius* (left) and a *secutor* do battle in a mosaic. The former's weapons, inspired by fishermen's equipment, consisted of a barbed trident and weighted net

## “The **weapons of the *retiarius*** show the carefully choreographed balance between **strength and vulnerability** in combat”

that showed a healed wound just above the knee consisting of four punctures in the pattern of a four on a gaming die.

The effectiveness of the *retiarius* was gruesomely revealed by the punctured skull discovered in Ephesus, but he did not always get his own way. A mosaic from Rome, now in Madrid, shows two scenes from a fight between a *secutor* named Astanax and the *retiarius* Kalendio. Kalendio threw his net over Astanax but, when his trident was caught in the folds of the net, Astanax was able to cut his way out and defeat Kalendio, who was then killed.

The same mosaic features another figure – an unarmed man in a tunic carrying a light

wand. He is the *summa rudis*, the referee, reminding us that this was not a free-for-all but instead a contest that must be fought within a framework of rules and rituals. These rules would clearly be understood by the audience, who would have been at least as appreciative of the fighters' skills as excited by pure bloodlust.

### **Political games**

The audience would also have been fully aware of who was putting on such entertainment for them. Gladiatorial shows were almost always staged by leading citizens – often to enhance their political careers by

currying favour with the electorate. Thus the walls of Pompeii are daubed with painted election notices alongside advertisements for gladiatorial spectacles.

One of many examples, found near the forum, reads: “The gladiatorial troupe of Aulus Suettius Certus will fight at Pompeii on 31 May. There will be a hunt and awnings. Good fortune to all Neronian games.”

There is little doubt about the popularity of the combats. Even tombs are covered with scratched graffiti showing the results of particular fights. A cartoon of two gladiators fighting in neighbouring Nola is captioned: “Marcus Attius, novice, victor; Hilarius, Neronian, fought 14, 12 victories, reprieved.”

This says a lot. Attius unexpectedly beat a veteran but, like most of the combats recorded at Pompeii, the loser was spared. Being a gladiator was not an automatic sentence of violent death.





This fourth-century AD mosaic shows a *secutor* fighting – and eventually defeating – a *retiarius*, two of the classes of gladiator in Rome

“Above most qualities, the Romans valued *virtus*: acting in a **brave and soldierly fashion**”

The person funding the games (the *editor*) would commission a troupe (*familia*) of gladiators run by a proprietor/trainer (*lanista*). One such *lanista* recorded in Pompeian graffiti was Marcus Mesonius, who acquired gladiators from the slave market. Legally, gladiators were the lowest of the low in Roman society, but a trained gladiator was a valuable commodity to a *lanista*, represent-

ing a considerable investment of time and money. It would therefore be in the *lanista*'s interest to keep his stable of gladiators healthy and to minimise the death rate.

A graffito now in Naples Museum gives the results of a show put on by Mesonius. Of 18 gladiators who fought, we know of eight victors, five defeated and reprieved, and three killed. Records in graffiti and on tombstones

suggest that this kind of ratio may have been typical. There were veterans – an unnamed *retiarius* commemorated with a tombstone in Rome boasted 14 victories – but few gladiators survived more than a dozen fights.

The painstaking forensic work on the Ephesus gladiator skeletons has provided startling and intimate insights into the way these men lived and died. Of the 68 bodies found, 66 were of adult males in their 20s. A rigorous training programme was attested by the enlarged muscle attachments of arms and legs. These were strong, athletic men, whose diet was dominated by grains and pulses,



exactly as reported in classical texts. Yet as well as muscle and stamina, gladiators needed a good layer of fat to protect them from cuts.

The Ephesus skeletons also provided evidence for good medical treatment. Many well-healed wounds were found on the bodies, including 11 head wounds, a well-set broken arm and a professional leg amputation.

On the other hand, 39 individuals exhibited single wounds sustained at or around the time of death. This suggests that these men did not die from multiple injuries but from a lone wound. This provides further evidence for the enforcement of strict rules in the arena, and the delivery of a *coup de grâce*. At the end of a bout, a defeated gladiator was required to wait for the life or death decision of the *editor* of the games. If the vote was for death, he was expected to accept it unflinchingly and calmly. It would be delivered as swiftly and effectively as possible.

Cicero speaks of this: “What even mediocre gladiator ever groans, ever alters the expression on his face? And which of them, even when he does succumb, ever contracts his neck when ordered to receive the blow?”

As we have seen, gladiators were at the bottom of the heap in Roman society. This remained the case no matter how much they were feted by the people. Above most qualities, the Romans valued *virtus* – which meant, first and foremost, acting in a brave and soldierly fashion. In the manner of his fighting, and above all in his quiet and courageous acceptance of death, even a gladiator – a despised slave – could display *virtus*. ■

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This sculpture, now in the Louvre, shows a dying gladiator. He would have been expected to accept his fate unflinchingly



A mosaic at Bignor Roman villa, Sussex, depicts two gladiators sparring

## Gladiators in Britain

Rome's northern outpost wasn't as bloodthirsty as the homeland

Compared with most other provinces of the Roman empire, surprisingly little evidence for gladiators has been discovered in Britain. The differences between Britain's amphitheatres may help to explain this. Those sited at the fortresses of Chester and Caerleon were built in the AD 70s to serve legionaries – the citizen-soldiers of Rome. Drawn from all over the empire, they would have expected to be provided with an amphitheatre – both for entertainment and to enact games on festivals associated with the imperial cult.

The legionary amphitheatres were stone-built, like many across the empire. However, at the British tribal capitals, the Romans built earthwork amphitheatres. There is evidence to show that these were infrequently used, and it appears that the native population didn't wholly embrace the Mediterranean concept of the Roman games.

Despite this, there is some evidence for the presence of gladiators. In 1738, a stone relief was found near Chester amphitheatre showing a left-handed *retiarius* – the only such depiction from the empire. And at Caerleon, a graffito on a stone shows the trident and *galerus* of a *retiarius* flanked by victory palms. These are the only references to gladiators from

any British amphitheatre, and both are from the legionary sites.

In Britain there is but a single gladiator wall painting. Of the three gladiator mosaics left to us, the best is a frieze of cupid-gladiators at the villa of Bignor in Sussex. This features a *secutor*, a *retiarius* and the *summa rudis* (referee) in a comic strip of an arena event.

Knife handles in bone and bronze are also found in the form of gladiators. Another evocative piece is a potsherd discovered in Leicester in 1851, on which was scratched the words “VERECVNDA LVDIA : LVCIVS GLADIATOR”, translating as: “Verecunda the actress, Lucius the gladiator”. This love token may relate to a couple in Britain but there is ambiguity. The pottery is of a type imported from Italy, and the graffito may have been inscribed there, too.

**“Evidence suggests that Britain's native population did not wholly embrace the Roman games”**







**Marked man**

A bust of Gaius Julius Caesar. By March 44 BC, the great general had made some powerful enemies by increasingly acting like a monarch

ALAMY



# For centuries we've been told that two Roman senators called **Brutus and Cassius** masterminded the plot to butcher **Julius Caesar** on the Ides of March. But is that the whole story? Did the brains behind the conspiracy reside somewhere else entirely – with one of Caesar's **greatest allies?**

**By Barry Strauss**

“What do you say, Caesar? Will someone of your stature pay attention to the dreams of a woman and the omens of foolish men?” So asked Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus of Gaius Julius Caesar. The 36-year-old Decimus spoke frankly to a man his elder by nearly 20 years, a man who was not only his chief but also Rome’s Dictator for Life. Yet Caesar was fond of Decimus, a longtime comrade-in-arms and a trusted lieutenant, so he let him speak when they met in Caesar’s official residence in the heart of Rome.

It was the morning of 15 March 44 BC – the Ides, as the Romans called the approximate middle of each month: the Ides of March. The Senate was in session that day, its members eagerly awaiting the dictator’s arrival. Yet Caesar had decided not to attend – allegedly because of bad health though, in fact, the real cause was a series of ill omens that had terrified his wife, Calpurnia.

Decimus changed Caesar’s mind. Caesar

## IN CONTEXT

### Caesar

By 44 BC Gaius Julius Caesar was the most famous and controversial man in Rome. A populist political star and great writer, he excelled in the military realm as well, pulling off a lightning conquest of Gaul – roughly, France and Belgium – as well as invading Britain and Germany (58–50 BC). When his enemies, the old guard in the Senate, removed him from command, Caesar invaded Italy. He went on to total victory in a civil war (49–45 BC) that ranged across the Mediterranean. His challenge now was to reconcile his surviving enemies and to convince staunch republicans to accept his power as dictator. It was a daunting task.

Caesar's killers used the *pugio* dagger, like the one shown here, as it was easy to smuggle into the Senate House

decided to go to the Senate meeting after all, if only to announce a postponement in person. What he didn’t know was that more than 60 conspirators were waiting for him there, daggers ready. Decimus, however, was all too aware – he was one of the plots’ ringleaders, and his actions that morning were about to define the course of history.

Despite this, most historians have traditionally cast Brutus and Cassius as the brains behind the conspiracy. In doing so they’ve followed the lead of Plutarch, who wrote 150 years after the assassination, and Shakespeare, who drew most of his story from Plutarch. They tend to omit Decimus, whom Shakespeare misnames ‘Decius’ and mentions only in the scene described above. Yet Decimus was key. His motives are less opaque than most think and his behaviour shows just how well organised the conspirators were.

The earliest surviving, detailed source for Caesar’s assassination makes Decimus *the* leader of the conspiracy. Sometime within







**In for the kill** A posse of senators stab Caesar to death in Vincenzo Camuccini's painting, completed in c1798. The plot succeeded, says Barry Strauss, because it was planned with military precision: after isolating their victim, the assassins acted rapidly and ruthlessly

a few decades of the fateful Ides of March, Nicolaus of Damascus, a scholar and bureaucrat, wrote a *Life of Caesar Augustus* – that is, of Augustus, Rome's first emperor (reigned 27 BC–AD 14). A later abridgement of this work survives, and it focuses on the assassination.

Until recently, scholars have tended to dismiss Nicolaus because he worked for Augustus and so had a motive to attack the conspirators. But recent work suggests that Nicolaus was a brilliant student of human nature who deserves more attention. A series of letters between Decimus and Cicero, all written after the assassination, also shed light on the plot, but they too have been neglected.

### Things turn sour

Unlike Brutus and Cassius, Decimus was Caesar's man. In the civil war between Caesar and the Roman general Pompey (49–45 BC), Brutus and Cassius both supported Pompey, before later changing sides. By contrast, Decimus backed Caesar from start to finish. During the conflict, Caesar appointed Decimus as his lieutenant to govern Gaul in his absence. At the war's end in 45 BC, Decimus left Gaul and returned to Italy with Caesar.

Then things turned sour. Between September 45 BC and March 44 BC Decimus changed his mind about Caesar. We don't know why, but it probably had more to do with power than principle. Decimus's letters to Cicero reveal a polite if terse man of action with a keen sense of honour, a nose for betrayal, and a thirst for vengeance.

Perhaps what moved Decimus was the sight of the two triumphal parades in Rome in autumn 45 BC that Caesar allowed his lieutenants in Spain to celebrate, against all custom. Caesar did not, however, grant a similar privilege to Decimus for his victory over a fierce Gallic tribe.

Or perhaps it was Caesar's appointment of his grandnephew Octavian (as Augustus was then known) as his second-in-command in a new war in 44 BC against Parthia (roughly, ancient Iran), Rome's rival in the eastern Mediterranean. Decimus, meanwhile, had to stay behind and govern Italian Gaul.

Whatever his motives, once he turned on Caesar, Decimus was indispensable. He was both the plotters' chief of security and their leading spy. As the only conspirator in Caesar's inner circle, Decimus was a mole, able to report on what Caesar was thinking. What's more, Decimus controlled a troupe of gladiators who played a key role on the Ides.

**“Decimus was the plotters' chief of security and their leading spy. He was able to report on what Caesar was thinking”**

Caesar remained in Rome between October 45 and March 44 BC – his longest stay there for years. He never revealed a programme but his actions betrayed that he aimed to change Rome's government. He behaved in ever-more dictatorial ways, summed up in his adoption of the unprecedented title of Dictator for Life.

He maintained Rome's traditional republican magistracies but elections increasingly became mere formalities – Caesar had the real power of appointment. Consuls, praetors (magistrates) and senators saw power shifting to Caesar's secretaries and advisors; some of these had only recently become Roman citizens, while some were even freedmen (former slaves). Caesar was not a king, but he had acquired the equivalent of royal power.

There was another issue at play here: what would happen after Caesar's death. To his critics, the favour he showed to Octavian raised the terrifying prospect of a dynasty.

Some Romans responded to Caesar's growing power with flattery. They voted him a long stream of honours including, most egregiously, naming him a god, with plans afoot for priests and a temple. Others, however, decided that he had to be stopped, so they decided on assassination. True, they acted in the name of the Republic and liberty, and against a budding monarchy, but they also saw in his growing influence a threat to their own power and privilege.

Plans to assassinate Caesar are attested as early as the summer of 45 BC but the conspiracy that struck on the Ides of March



did not gel until February 44 BC. At least 60 men joined it (of whom we can identify just 20 today – and about some we know little more than their names). According to a later writer, Seneca, the majority of the conspirators were not Caesar's enemies – former allies of Pompey – but his friends and supporters.

That certainly can't be said for Brutus and Cassius, the best-known conspirators. Cassius was a military man and a former Pompey supporter who despised Caesar's dictatorial ways. As for Brutus, he was hardly the friend of Caesar whom Shakespeare depicts.

Brutus's mother was Caesar's former mistress. However, Brutus supported Pompey until the latter lost to Caesar on the battlefield in 48 BC, at which point Brutus switched sides. He promptly betrayed his ex-chief by providing Caesar intelligence about the likely whereabouts of Pompey, who had escaped after the battle. Afterwards, Caesar rewarded Brutus with high office.

This, however, was to prove the high point of Caesar and Brutus's relationship. In the summer of 45 BC Brutus divorced his wife and remarried. His new bride was Porcia, his cousin and, far more pertinently to this story, daughter of Caesar's late archenemy Cato.

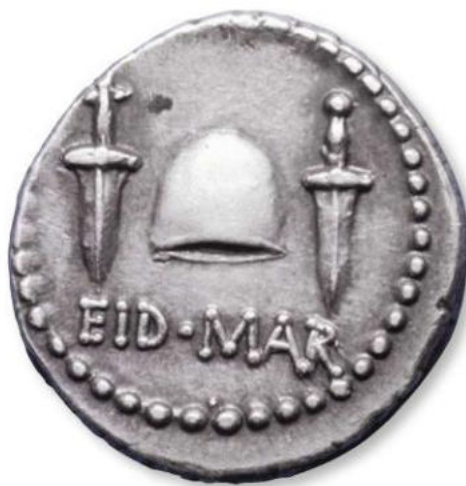
Crucially, in the winter of 44 BC, Caesar's opponents began calling on Brutus to uphold the tradition of his ancestors, who included the founder of the Roman Republic, Lucius Junius Brutus, the man who had led the expulsion of Rome's kings hundreds of years earlier. And so, through a combination of pride, principle – and, perhaps, love for his wife – Brutus turned on Caesar.

### Military precision

The plot to assassinate Caesar succeeded because it was meticulously planned, and flawlessly executed. With generals such as Decimus, Cassius and Caesar's veteran commander Trebonius involved, one would expect nothing less than military precision. The assassins chose to end Caesar's life themselves rather than by hiring killers – a decision that showed their seriousness of purpose. And by striking at a Senate meeting they made it a public act rather than a private vendetta – an assassination and not a murder.

That this was a professional operation is even reflected in the killers' choice of weapon. Caesar's assassins attacked him with daggers and not, as is sometimes imagined, with swords. The latter were too big to sneak into the Senate House and too unwieldy for use in close quarters. In particular, the killers used a military dagger (the *pugio*) that was becoming standard issue for legionaries.

Military daggers were not only practical weapons but also honourable ones. Caesar's supporters later called the assassins common



This coin, issued by Brutus, one of the plot's ringleaders, displays the military daggers employed against Caesar

**“Before the end, Caesar wrapped his toga around his face and fell at the foot of the statue of his great rival, Pompey”**

criminals and accused them of using the *sica*, a short, curved blade that had the negative connotation of a switchblade or flick knife. So, in 44 BC, Brutus issued a coin that celebrated the Ides of March with two military daggers. Again, he wanted to show that the assassins were no mere murderers.

The Roman Senate House still stands in the Roman Forum, and most visitors assume that Caesar was killed there – but he was not, nor on the Capitoline Hill, as Shakespeare states. The assassination took place about half a mile away from the Forum in Pompey's Senate House, ironically built by Caesar's great rival. It was part of a huge complex including a theatre, a park, a covered portico, shops and offices. Gladiatorial games took place in the theatre on the Ides of March, which gave Decimus an excuse for deploying his gladiators near Pompey's Senate House. Their real purpose was as a backup security force.

As a general, Caesar had a bodyguard but he made a point of dismissing it after returning to civilian life in Rome. He wanted to seem accessible and fearless. What's more, only senators could enter a Senate meeting, so most of Caesar's retinue would have had to remain outside the building. This made the dictator uniquely vulnerable inside the Senate House. Still, Caesar had appointed many of the senators personally, and they included military men. If they came to Caesar's aid, they could overwhelm the assassins.

The assassins' response to this threat was to attack at speed, isolating their target before striking. Even before Caesar took his seat on the tribunal, several assassins stood behind the chair while others surrounded him as if trying to grab his attention. The truth is that they were forming a perimeter.

Then the attack sprang into action. Tillius Cimber, a hard-drinking scrapper of a soldier whom Caesar favoured, held his hands out disrespectfully and pulled at Caesar's toga. At this signal, his co-conspirators struck, led by Publius Servilius Casca.

Caesar immediately called out to Cimber: “Why, this is violence,” and hurled an oath at Casca, labelling him either “impious” or “accursed”. However, he never said: “*Et tu, Brute?*” (“You too, Brutus?”) – that phrase is a Renaissance invention. Ancient authors report a rumour that Caesar said to Brutus, in Greek: “You too, child.” But they doubt that he even said that.

Caesar, the old warrior, tried to fight back. He stabbed Casca with his *stylus* – a small, pointed, iron writing utensil – and managed to get back up. Two of his supporters among the senators, Lucius Marcus Censorinus and Gaius Calvisius Sabinus, then attempted to reach him but the conspirators blocked their way and forced them to flee.

Meanwhile, Trebonius had been assigned to buttonhole his old comrade Mark Antony and engage him in conversation outside the Senate's door. Antony was a veteran soldier, strong, dangerous and loyal to Caesar. If he'd entered the Senate room, he would have sat on the tribunal with Caesar and could have come to his aid.

With Mark Antony detained by Trebonius, there was little Caesar could do to defend himself. It probably took only minutes for him to die – succumbing to what most of the sources state were 23 wounds. Before the end, he wrapped his toga around his face and, in an ironic turn of events, fell at the foot of a statue of his rival, Pompey.

For all its brilliance, the plot to kill Caesar didn't prove the panacea that the assassins hoped. Civil war soon broke out again and, to a man, the plotters were to suffer violent deaths. What's more, the Republic that they aimed to defend perished and gave way to an empire. That, however, does not brand them as foolish idealists. It merely shows that their political acumen did not match the military skill they displayed on the Ides of March. ■

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# THE BLOO AUGUSTU

The man born Caius Octavius seemed an unlikely first emperor – but, as **Adrian Goldsworthy** reveals, he slaughtered his way to power

**B**efore his death 2,000 years ago in August AD 14, the ageing Roman emperor Augustus composed a political statement that recorded his unprecedented bid for power half a century earlier. “At the age of 19 on my own responsibility and at my own expense I raised an army, with which I successfully championed the liberty of the republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction.”

The events to which he was referring began on the Ides of March 44 BC, when Roman dictator Julius Caesar was murdered by self-proclaimed ‘liberators’. It was only at Caesar’s funeral that it was discovered that his great-nephew Augustus – then called Caius Octavius and from an obscure family – had been named as the murdered ruler’s principal heir.

The teenager chose to interpret this legacy as full adoption, and announced that he intended to succeed not simply to Caesar’s wealth and name, but also to his high office. That was not the way politics normally worked in Rome, but these were disturbed times: the old Republican system of elected magistrates was crumbling after decades of violent competition and spells of civil war.

The young Augustus used Caesar’s money and name to raise an army from serving or former soldiers of his charismatic ‘father’. Mark Antony (one of Caesar’s leading subordinates) was already trying to rally the same people to him and did not take his

young rival seriously, dubbing him “a boy who owes everything to a name”.

A Senate urged on by the famous orator Cicero saw Antony as the big threat, and feared that he was aiming to seize supreme power by force. In a political system in which a man had to be in his forties before he could seek the highest offices of the state, a 19-year-old with no political record seemed to present little danger. Cicero saw a teenager at the head of legions of veteran soldiers, and decided that he could be useful. They should “praise the young man, reward him, then discard him”.

At first all went well. Augustus’s veterans played the key role in defeating Antony and driving his army across the Alps. Discarding the young Augustus, however, proved difficult: his soldiers served him, not the Senate. In the meantime Antony allied with another of Caesar’s old supporters, Lepidus, thereby becoming stronger than ever. Augustus decided to join them so that all of the murdered dictator’s supporters and

soldiers were on the same side – at least for the moment.

They declared a triumvirate – a board of three supreme magistrates to restore the state: effectively, a joint dictatorship.

The first thing the triumvirs did was to order the murder of prominent opponents, including Cicero. Marching unopposed into Rome, they posted up proscription lists bearing the names of men who were set outside the protection of law. Anyone could kill a proscribed man, and if they brought his severed head to the authorities they would be rewarded with a share of the victim’s





# THE RISE OF



The statue of Emperor Caesar Augustus at the Villa of Livia, northern Rome. The first emperor presided over a period of peace and stability but his ascent had been marked by chaos and savagery



property, the rest going to the triumvirs to pay their army. Antony, Augustus and Lepidus traded names in a scene brought chillingly to life by Shakespeare: "These many, then, shall die, their names are pricked."

Quite a few of the proscribed managed to escape abroad, but hundreds died. In later years there emerged a whole genre of stories of dramatic escapes and grim deaths, of rescue and betrayal. The senator Velleius Paterculus concluded that "one thing, however, demands comment: that toward the proscribed their wives showed greatest loyalty, their freedmen not a little, their slaves some, their sons none."

Opinion was less certain about which of the triumvirs was most brutal in his pursuit of the proscribed; after the event, each tried to shift the blame to his allies. Yet many people were shocked that the young Augustus should have had so many enemies he wanted to kill. In the years that followed, a reputation for excessive cruelty clung to him, fuelled by the frequency with which impassioned pleas for mercy were met with a simple: "You must die."

Antony and Augustus took an army to Greece and defeated two of Caesar's murderers, Brutus and Cassius, at the battle of Philippi in 42 BC. Antony got most of the credit, both for winning the war and for treating captured aristocrats and the remains of the dead with fitting respect.

**"Many were shocked that Augustus should have had so many enemies he wanted to kill. A reputation for excessive cruelty clung to him"**

The alliance between the three triumvirs was always based on self-interest and came under increasing pressure in the years that followed. It narrowly survived a rebellion led by Antony's brother Lucius against Augustus, and also, after a long struggle, defeated Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompey the Great – Julius Caesar's former ally, son-in-law and, finally, enemy. By 36 BC the triumvirate became an alliance between two when Lepidus was marginalised. Augustus kept him in comfortable captivity for the rest of his life, a gesture that mixed mercy with cruelty, prolonging the humiliation of an ambitious man.

After the clash at Philippi, Mark Antony was placed in charge of Rome's provinces and allies in the eastern Mediterranean. Augustus remained in Italy, where he carried out the

task of providing the farms promised as rewards to the triumvirs' loyal soldiers. The estates of the proscribed were insufficient, so more and more confiscations were arbitrarily imposed on the towns of Italy. The local gentry suffered the most, leading the poet Virgil to write of the plight of the dispossessed: "Ah, shall I ever, long years hence, look again on my country's bounds, on my humble cottage with its turf-clad roof?... Is an impious soldier to hold these well-tilled fallows?... See where strife has brought our unhappy citizens!"

Augustus got most of the blame for the confiscations in an Italy exhausted by civil war and desperate for stability. As relations with Antony broke down, it was better to wage war against a foreign threat, so Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, was demonised as a sinister eastern temptress who had corrupted a noble Roman and turned him against his own people. (In 41 BC, Antony had taken the queen as a lover, renewing the affair three years later.) Privately few were fooled, but publicly the 'whole of Italy' took an oath to follow Augustus and save Rome from this 'threat'.

### After Antony

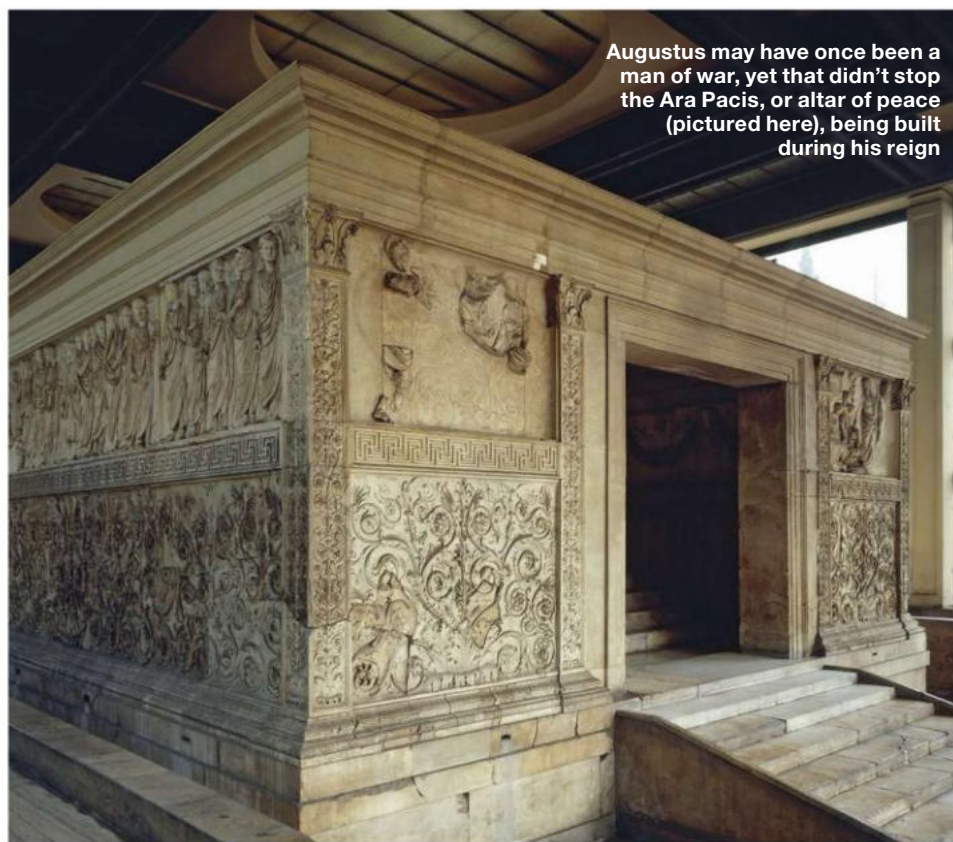
Relations between the remaining triumvirs deteriorated until, in 31 BC, the two clashed in battle at Actium in Greece. Antony was defeated and took his own life the next year.

With Antony dead, the 33-year-old Augustus faced no serious rivals and, since he took care to monopolise military force, there was no real danger of new challengers appearing. However, that did not mean that the man who had slaughtered his way to power was safe from assassins' knives, nor that it would be easy to create a stable regime.

There was little affection for Augustus, but Romans of all classes were desperate for peace, and hoped simply to be able to live without fear of proscription lists and confiscations. That security is what he gave them. His control was veiled, expressed in a way that appeared constitutional, even though the veil was thin, since no one could take his powers from him or break his hold over the loyalty of the legions. What mattered was that years and then decades passed, and stability and the rule of law persisted as it had not done in living memory.

Peace and the simple virtues of an idealised and now restored past dominate the art and literature of these years. It is also no coincidence that one of the most striking monuments of the Augustan age is the Ara Pacis – the altar of peace (shown left).

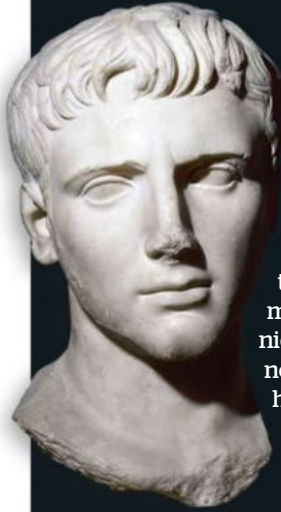
The peace that Italy enjoyed (after generations of civil strife) did not mean that Rome was no longer at war. At the same time,



Augustus may have once been a man of war, yet that didn't stop the Ara Pacis, or altar of peace (pictured here), being built during his reign



# Augustus's life and times



Augustus is born with the name Caius Octavius. His father is a member of the country gentry and the first in the family to enter the Senate in Rome. His mother is Julius Caesar's niece. Despite this, there is no reason to expect him to have an exceptional career.

23 September 63 BC

15 March 44 BC

43 BC

When Julius Caesar is murdered, Augustus is in Greece, receiving military training ahead of the dictator's planned invasion of Parthia. A few days later, it emerges that Caesar has nominated Augustus as his principal heir.

Having raised a private army and helped the Senate defeat his great rival Antony, Augustus leads his army back to Rome and demands to be elected consul. Soon afterwards, he joins Antony and Lepidus in the triumvirate.

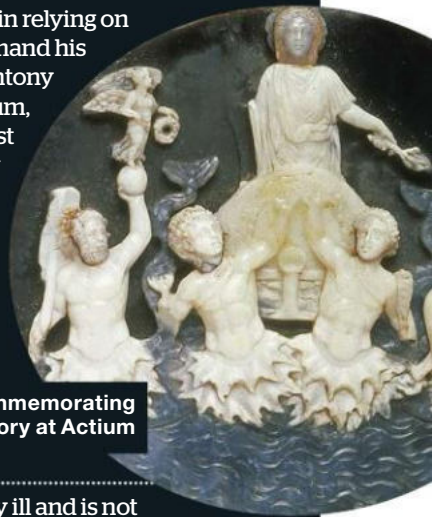
36 BC

Relying heavily on the skill of his friend Agrippa (right), Augustus defeats the fleet of Sextus Pompey. The war has pushed Augustus to breaking point. After one defeat, he was cast ashore with a few attendants and considered suicide.



2 September 31 BC

Augustus, once again relying on Agrippa to command his forces, defeats Antony at the battle of Actium, fought off the coast of Greece. Antony flees, with no hope of recovering from this disaster. Within a year, he and Cleopatra kill themselves.



A cameo commemorating Augustus's victory at Actium

16 January 27 BC

Caesar's heir is given the name Augustus to honour him for his service to the state. He is now Imperator (or 'generalissimo') Caesar Augustus, a personal name without any precedent.

23 BC

Augustus falls seriously ill and is not expected to survive. He publicly hands his signet ring to Agrippa, but doesn't name a successor to his position. He eventually recovers.

Augustus is named Father of his Country by the Senate. Later in the year scandal rocks his family when he exiles Julia (right), his only child, for serial adultery. Augustus has already adopted her two older sons with Agrippa, but both die young, leaving Tiberius to succeed.



2 BC

Three Roman legions led by Varus are wiped out by allies-turned-enemies among the Germanic tribes at Teutoburg forest. It is the most serious defeat of Augustus's career. For days he roams the palace calling out: "Quintilius Varus, return my legions!"

AD 9

Augustus dies in a family villa at Nola. It's later rumoured that he was poisoned by his wife, Livia (right), who feared that he planned to change the succession. Augustus's body is carried in state to Rome, and after a public funeral he is declared a god.



19 August AD 14



A re-creation of a Germanic defensive wall at the time of the battle of the Teutoburg forest



“Honour after honour was **voted to Augustus by the Senate and people**, including the title of Father of his Country”

Augustus boasted of victory after victory won over foreign rulers and peoples, often adding new territory to the empire.

Augustus presented himself as the greatest servant of the state, and defeating external enemies was a glorious means of service. He also laboured untiringly and publicly to restore good government throughout the empire, spending his days receiving petitions and resolving the problems long neglected by the inertia of the Senate under the Republic.

Rome itself – and, to a degree, communities across Italy and the provinces – was physically renewed, so that Augustus could boast that he had found the city “brick and left it marble”. There were monuments to his glory, but many of them were also practical amenities for the wider good: aqueducts, fountains and sewers, bath-houses for comfort, temples to restore a proper relationship with the gods who protected the Roman people, and theatres and circuses for entertainment.

Life was more stable under Augustus, and for most people it was also more comfortable. No one was left in any doubt that this happy condition relied upon his continued activity, for Augustus's name and image was everywhere. Relief at the end of civil war slowly became more or less grudging gratitude, and eventually turned into genuine affection.

Time played an important part. Augustus ruled for 40 years after the death of Antony, and everyone became used to his leadership and the system he had created, while the memories of his bloody rise to power gradually faded. There was no enthusiasm to swap the present peace and prosperity for a return to the violently unpredictable decades preceding it. Honour after honour was voted to him by the Senate and the people, including the title of Father of his Country.

Thanks to this reincarnation as a man of peace, Augustus – the first emperor of Rome – would for centuries also be remembered as one of the best. **H**

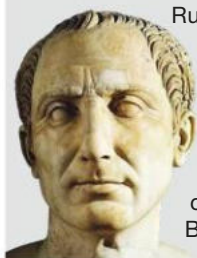
**Adrian Goldsworthy** is an ancient historian and novelist, author of *Augustus: From Revolutionary to Emperor* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014)

## SEVEN OTHER GREAT RULERS OF ROME

### Caius Julius Caesar (100–44 BC)

#### The iconic general

Caesar, Augustus's great-uncle, joined in an informal alliance with Pompey and Crassus, the two most important men in the state. In 49 BC Pompey and Caesar became rivals when the latter crossed the Rubicon and began a new civil war. Caesar won, and copied Sulla by using the dictatorship as the basis of his power. When this was made permanent, he was murdered by conspirators including Brutus and Cassius.



### Nero (AD 37–68, emperor from 54)

#### The bon vivant

Nero was the last of the four members of Augustus's extended family to rule. A teenager when he came to power, he was fonder of luxury and performance than government. Yet the fact that he remained in power for 14 years testified to the affection for Augustus's family and the acceptance of imperial rule as natural. In the end he lost the support of the army, followed by the Senate, and took his own life.



### Trajan (AD 53–117, emperor from 98)

#### The last conqueror

Trajan's family were Roman citizens from Spain, making him the first non-Italian emperor. He was the last of the great conquerors, adding Dacia – modern-day Romania – to the empire in campaigns celebrated on Trajan's Column, which can still be seen in Rome. In the last years of his life he invaded Parthia, but most of his conquests there were abandoned by his successor, the emperor Hadrian.



### Lucius Cornelius Sulla

(c138–79 BC)

#### The first dictator

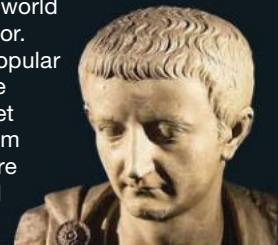
In 88 BC Sulla was the first Roman commander to turn his legions against the city of Rome and seize power by force. After fighting a war in the east, he returned in 83 BC and stormed the city for a second time. He made himself dictator – turning a temporary emergency measure into the basis for long-term power – and created the first proscriptions, posting up in the Forum death lists that named hundreds of his opponents.



### Tiberius (42 BC–AD 37, emperor from AD 14)

#### The unpopular heir

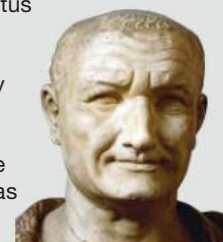
Augustus's stepson Tiberius was not first choice as successor but was adopted in AD 4 after the deaths of Augustus's grandsons. By the time of Tiberius's succession, few people were able to imagine a world without an emperor. Tiberius was unpopular and far less active than Augustus. Yet the imperial system became even more firmly established during his rule.



### Vespasian (AD 9–79, emperor from 69)

#### The outsider

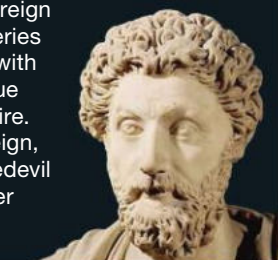
Vespasian was the fourth man to win power in a civil war that raged for over a year after Nero's death. Neither related to Augustus nor from the old Roman aristocracy, he came from the local gentry of Italy. All of the powers accumulated by Augustus were awarded to Vespasian, and he was followed as emperor by his two sons in turn, giving the empire three decades of stability. He wasn't loved, but he was widely respected.



### Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180, emperor from 161)

#### The philosopher

The last of Edward Gibbon's 'five good emperors', Marcus Aurelius was an earnest man who wrote a philosophical work, *The Meditations*, and tried to rule virtuously and in the style set by Augustus. His reign was beset by a series of catastrophes, with warfare and plague ravaging the empire. After Aurelius's reign, civil war would bedevil the empire for over a century.







A group relaxes over a glass of wine in this Pompeian wall painting. Treasures such as this give us a wonderful insight into what life was like before the town was devastated in AD 79

# THE **A** TO **Z** OF POMPEII

Buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79, and gradually disinterred from the mid-18th century, Pompeii is probably the world's most famous archaeological site. But what was life like for the Romans who lived there? Not that different from our own, as **Mary Beard** reveals, complete with yob culture, nightlife and plonk



## A is for artists at work

House makeovers? Style gurus? Des res? Painters and decorators did a roaring trade in Pompeii, transforming dark and often pokey interiors with a lavish coat of paint – much as they do today. And we now have a precious glimpse of how the painters operated. In one house, a team of three or four decorators was interrupted by the eruption almost mid-brush stroke. The men scarpered as the ash fell, abandoning their tools, 50 pots of paints and a bucket of fresh plaster precariously balanced up a ladder. The assistants had been busy slapping on the plaster and the broad washes of colour, while the masters had drawn out the design in rough sketches and were painting the figures and the fiddly bits.



These red, blue and pink pigments in bowls were used for fresco painting in Pompeii

## B is for banking

The Romans didn't have cheques or credit cards, but there were money lenders – the banks of the day. The most famous Pompeian banker was Lucius Caecilius Jucundus (now best known as the hero of the early parts of the *Cambridge Latin Course*). Some of his records and receipts, stashed away in the attic of his house, give an idea of his business activities. Banker is actually a bit of a euphemism – he was mainly an auctioneer who profited on both sides of the transaction, charging the seller a commission then lending money to the buyer at a healthy rate of interest.

## C is for cafe culture

The latest estimate reckons that there were about 200 cafes and bars in the town – roughly speaking, one for every 60 residents. A counter usually ran along the street to catch the passing trade, selling cheap takeaway food from large jars. Wine was stacked up behind it and there were tables in a back room for



A bowl full of olives, preserved under the ash from the eruption of Vesuvius

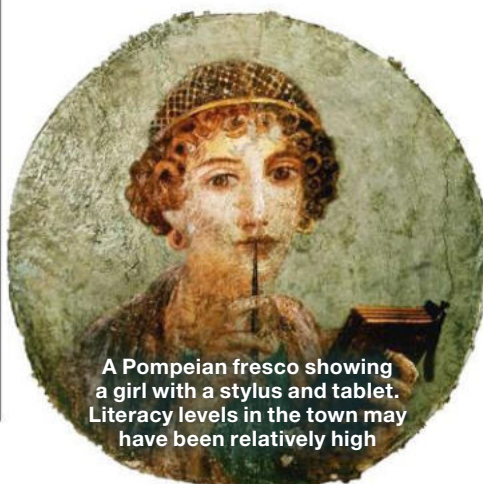
sit-down eating and drinking. It was the reverse of today's society, in which the rich eat out and the poor cook up at home. In Pompeii it was the poor, living in tiny quarters with no facilities, who relied on cafe food.

## D is for diet (and dormice)

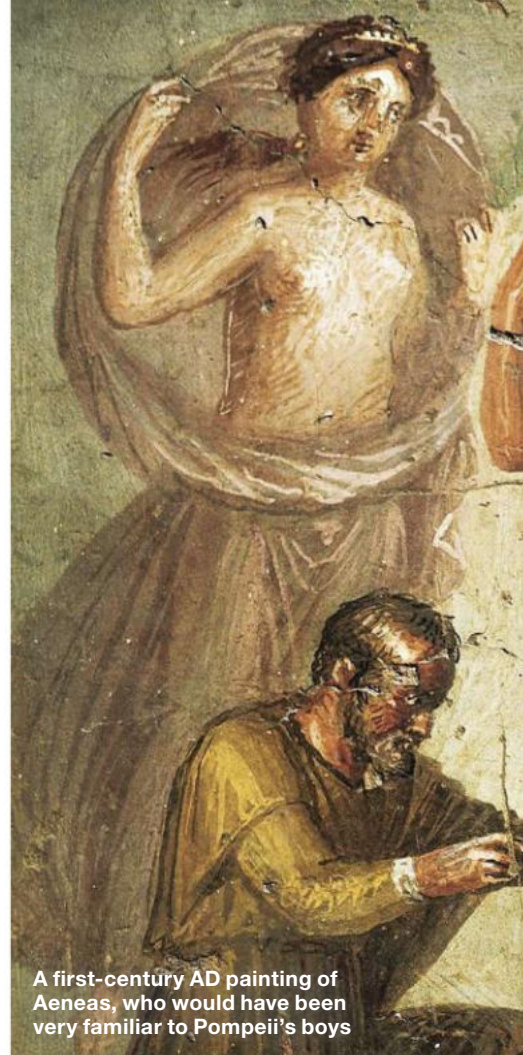
Rich Pompeians *did* occasionally eat dormice. Or so a couple of strange pottery containers – identified, thanks to descriptions by ancient writers, as dormouse cages – suggest. But elaborate banquets were a rarity and just for the rich. The staple foods were bread, olives, beans, eggs, cheese, fruits and vegetables (Pompeian cabbages were particularly prized), plus some tasty fish. Meat was less in evidence, and was mainly pork. This was a relatively healthy diet. In fact, the ancient Pompeians were on average slightly taller than modern Neapolitans.

## E is for education, education, education

One of the puzzles of Pompeii is where the kids went to school. No obvious school buildings or classrooms have been found. The likely answer is that teachers took their



A Pompeian fresco showing a girl with a stylus and tablet. Literacy levels in the town may have been relatively high



A first-century AD painting of Aeneas, who would have been very familiar to Pompeii's boys

class of boys (and almost certainly *only* boys) to some convenient shady portico and did their teaching there. A wonderful series of paintings of scenes of life in the Forum seems to show exactly that happening – with one poor miscreant being given a nasty beating in front of his classmates. And the curriculum? To judge from the large number of quotes from Virgil's *Aeneid* scrawled on Pompeian walls, the young were well drilled in the national epic.

## F is for faith communities

The official religion of the town sponsored solemn sacrifices and raucous festivals celebrating Jupiter, Apollo, Venus and the Roman emperor, who was to all intents and purposes a god himself. But alongside this – happily co-existing, so far as we can tell – were all kinds of other religions. One of the most impressive sights at Pompeii is the little temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis, once tended by its white-clad, shaven-headed priests. We have evidence, too, for Jews and worshippers of Cybele, known as the Great Mother. There is no clear sign of any Christians, but in one house an ivory statuette of the Indian goddess Lakshmi has turned up. Souvenir, curiosity or object of devotion? Nobody knows.





rife with human effluent. Ancient doctors recommended not going to the baths with an open wound – it could lead to gangrene.

## I is for illness

Illness struck the young hard. Over half of Pompeii's children were dead by the age of 10, and the telltale marks left by childhood infectious diseases are clearly visible on the teeth of many of the victims of the eruption. But the good news was that, if they survived into adolescence, ancient Pompeians could expect a life not much shorter than our own. For those who fell sick, the doctors would try out a diagnosis and a cure – equipped with many of the same instruments, from tweezers to gynaecological specula, that you'd find in a modern medical surgery.

## J is for job seekers

Dozens of trades and professions are found at Pompeii: carpenters, actors, surveyors, gem-workers, architects, innkeepers, perfume-sellers, laundry men. There is even a 'public pig keeper' by the name of Nigella. Occasionally there was big money to be made, but mostly these were low-profit-margin occupations, and many of those involved were ex-slaves or slaves still working to add to the fortunes of their masters.

If you didn't have a job, what then? One of the paintings of Forum life shows a beggar (plus dog) taking handouts from a grand lady. Mostly, though, the poor did not exist. In a world without social care, those without means of support simply died.

## K is for kitchens

You might think that, even in the grandest houses, Pompeian kitchens could hardly have cooked up a banquet. They are mostly small, dark, and equipped with just a hearth and a place to boil a few pots. But this impression



ABOVE: The remains of a kitchen with pots put back on the hearth  
LEFT: This glass jug survived the eruption of AD 79



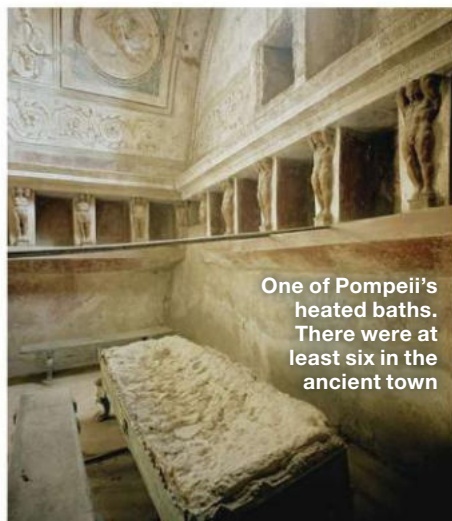
may be misleading: plenty of elaborate kitchen utensils survive, from egg poachers and vast cauldrons to mousse moulds and industrial-scale sieves. For those occasional banquets, we must imagine preparations extending well beyond the kitchen. One ancient novel talks about a slave shelling peas on the front step, while doubling as hall porter. Large joints of meat would have sizzled away on portable braziers, perhaps in front of the guests.

## L is for lavatories

The usual place for a Pompeian lavatory was in the kitchen. Hygiene aside, it presumably functioned as a convenient waste-disposal unit, in addition to its more familiar function. A few had shafts that dropped down into a running water supply, though the truth is that rich Pompeians were more interested in using piped water to run ornamental fountains than to make their ablutions more efficient. Many toilets vented directly into cesspits, and the remains still lingering in them today are a favourite target of archaeologists wanting to find out what really went into and out of Pompeian stomachs.

## M is for mains drains

Why are there so many stepping stones in Pompeii's streets? The answer is simple. There were hardly any public drains to take rainwater and sewage out of the city. Most water – and a lot else, no doubt – flowed out through the streets, which must have been transformed into rather unsavoury rivers in a downpour. There were no such features at the nearby town of Herculaneum, which had a developed system of underground drainage.



One of Pompeii's heated baths. There were at least six in the ancient town

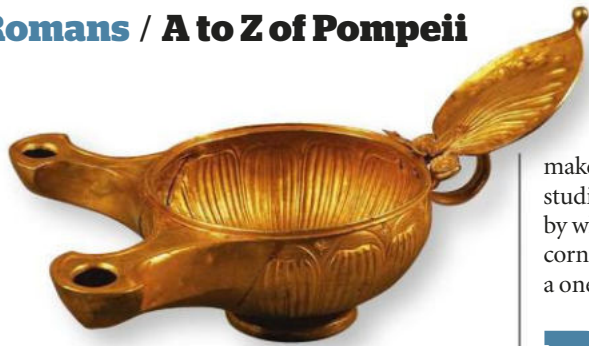
## G is for garum

No Roman cooking was complete without *garum* – a disgusting concoction of rotten fish. A more generous interpretation sees it as a version of the spicy fish sauces that are part of modern Thai cooking. It was popular in Pompeii, which had at least one *garum* shop. One of the town's richest families made its fortune in the trade – and advertised the fact by decorating their front hall with a design of *garum* jars in mosaic. *Garum* traders were canny businessmen, with an eye on different markets. A kosher version (guaranteed to contain no shellfish) was produced for the local Jewish community.

## H is for hygiene

Pompeii boasted at least six public bathing complexes – some owned by the city council, some by private enterprise operations. Only a few of the very richest houses had their own facilities. The vast majority of the population would have exercised, scraped down, sweated and taken a dip in one of the communal establishments. As you might imagine, they were hotbeds of germs and infection. The plunge pools had limited water circulation and no chlorination, so must have been





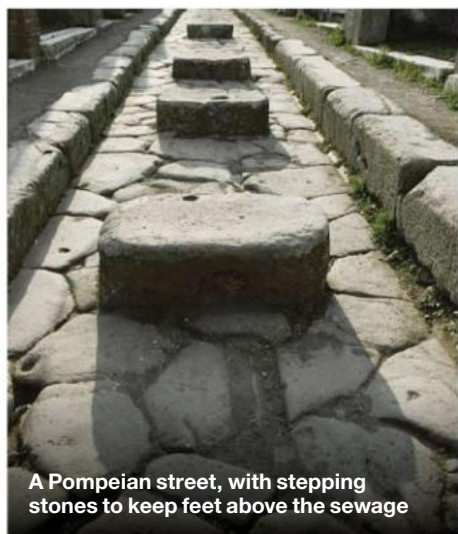
Thousands of lamps were found in Pompeii. This particularly precious example is made of gold

## N is for nightlife

When the night fell in Pompeii, it was very dark indeed. The thousands of oil lamps discovered can hardly have made much impact on the gloom. All the same, the bars kept on serving. Some hung welcoming lamps over their front doors. One striking example is in the shape of a pygmy with an enormous phallus, lights dangling from every extremity. Elsewhere, a group of mates signing themselves “the late drinkers” left their message on a Pompeian wall. Sign writers, too, were busy in the dark. A man called Celer posted up an advertisement for a gladiator show, “written,” it says, “by the light of the moon”. Add to this the noise of all the guard dogs barking, the horses bellowing and the odd wakeful, honking pig and it was probably noisy as well as dark after hours in Pompeii.

## O is for one-way streets

How did two carts pass in a Pompeian street? A few of the major thoroughfares were wide enough for two-way traffic, but the vast majority were definitely single track. Reversing would be next to impossible with a horse-drawn cart, never mind all the stepping stones in the way. One solution was to ring a loud warning bell, or send a boy ahead to

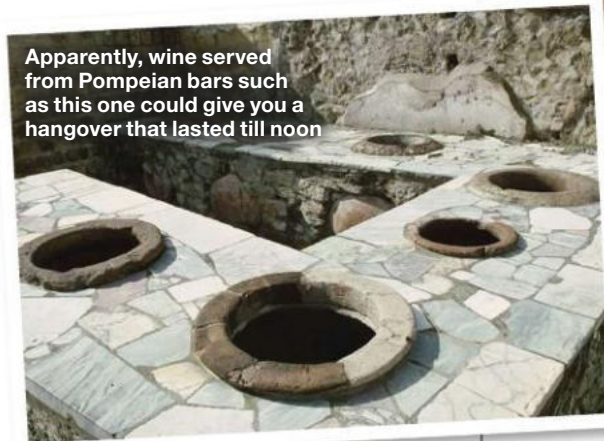


A Pompeian street, with stepping stones to keep feet above the sewage

make sure the way was clear. But, having studied the wheel ruts and the scrapes made by wheels hitting the curbs as they rounded corners, some archaeologists now think that a one-way street system was in operation.

## P is for plonk

One of the best-known products of the land surrounding Pompeii was wine. The excellent *premier cru*, Falernian, came from nearby. And one amphora of Pompeian wine was prized enough by someone that it found its way to England, though it was probably a gift or a souvenir rather than evidence of a flourishing wine trade with the northern provinces. But much of the really local wine was bottom of the range. One Roman writer complained that it gave you a hangover till midday.



Apparently, wine served from Pompeian bars such as this one could give you a hangover that lasted till noon

## Q is for quality of life

Life was comfortable for the wealthy, who lived in large – albeit often rather dark – houses with gardens and shady colonnades. One house in the centre of the town was as big as some of the palaces occupied by the kings of the ancient world, and a few spectacular multi-storey properties on the western side of the town enjoyed marvellous views over the Mediterranean. For slaves and the poor, however, things were bleak. They lived in cramped service quarters or in single rooms above their shops or workshops – with not much more space than a family would need to sleep. Hence, in part, the attraction of cafes and bars where there was room to stretch out.

## R is for real estate

Despite the occasional fortune made in the *garum* trade, land was the main source of wealth in Pompeii. Every owner of a grand house in Pompeii would have had a country



property, too, growing vines or olives, or grazing sheep. Not many of these properties have been found – unlike the town itself, it's harder to know where to look for them. But the country burial ground of one well-known Pompeian family has been discovered, next to what is presumed to be their country house. And a magnificent estate, which may have belonged to the family of Nero's wife Poppaea, survives at Oplontis, a few miles from the town.

## S is for sex workers

The ancient brothel – a rather grim corner property, with five cubicles, a series of erotic paintings and a lavatory – is now one of the most visited sites in Pompeii. Ironically, it is more frequented now than it was in the town's heyday. That said, hundreds of bits of graffiti from satisfied Roman customers survive on its walls, as well as a learned post-coital quotation from Virgil. But sex was almost certainly for sale in all kinds of other parts of town, in bars or seedy one-room lodgings. For the rich, sex was a service provided by slaves.





One Pompeian artist imagined a strange foreign world inhabited by crocodiles and hippo-slaying pygmies

## T is for theatre-goers

Pompeii had two theatres and one amphitheatre. The amphitheatre (the earliest to survive anywhere in the world) featured occasional gladiator shows and wild beast hunts, with boars and goats rather than lions. No less popular were the theatrical performances: plays, mimes and ancient pantomime, a combination of music and dance that is the ancestor of modern ballet,



This Pompeian brothel is adorned with graffiti left by satisfied customers who used it 2,000 years ago

rather than our traditional Christmas entertainment. Fan clubs supported particular artists, proclaiming their enthusiasm on the walls of the town: "Come back soon, Anicetus."

## U is for upstairs, downstairs

What happened upstairs is another big Pompeian puzzle. Many houses had upper floors, but most were destroyed by the force of the eruption. The telltale surviving stairways, leading up from the ground floor, give away their presence even when all other trace has gone. There are all kinds of guesses about how these quarters were used – perhaps for storage, as slave dormitories or as rental apartments for lodgers.

## V is for voting

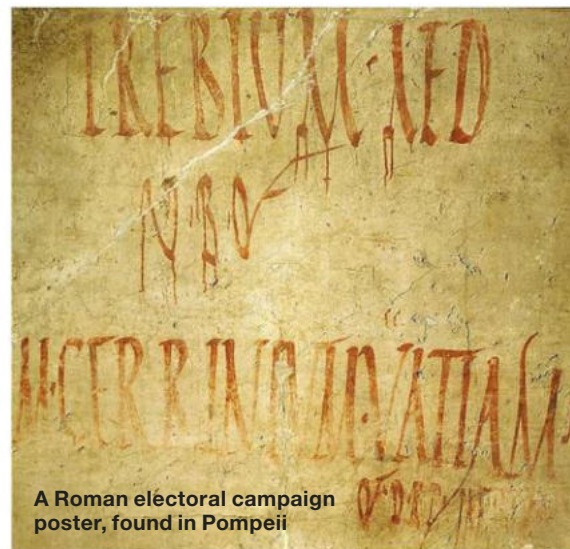
Pompeian men went to the polls each year to vote for four officials to take charge of town business: a senior pair called 'the two men for delivering justice', and a junior pair of *aediles*, officials who took care of markets, city property and streets. Painted slogans indicate where support lay – for example: "The bakers are supporting Caius Julius Polybius." Negative campaigning ("Don't vote for...") was not the custom. But slogans such as "The slackers say vote for Polybius" probably amounted to much the same.

## W is for writing on the wall

Pompeian walls, outside and sometimes inside, were covered with notices and graffiti. These included adverts for shows and electoral campaign posters as well as personal messages of every sort: "Please, no shitting here," "Successus the weaver's in love with Iris and she doesn't give a toss" and "A bronze jar has gone from this shop – reward for its return." How far the ability to read and write spread through Pompeian society is a matter of dispute. Some historians put literacy as low as 20 per cent of the adult males, but the sheer prevalence of writing and the simple everyday information conveyed by it (including price lists) suggests that it was considerably higher.

## X is for xenophobia

Pompeii was a surprisingly cosmopolitan town. With finds including graffiti in Hebrew, ivories from the far east, Egyptian statues and traces of exotic spices, it's clear interaction with other nationalities took place. That did



A Roman electoral campaign poster, found in Pompeii

not necessarily mean that the locals embraced foreign cultures with easy-going tolerance. One favourite theme in painting was the imaginary life of pygmies on the Nile: these strange diminutive creatures were depicted getting up to all kinds of weird practices, from cannibalism to group sex.

## Y is for yob culture

Antisocial behaviour was a feature of ancient life as much as our own – not to mention binge-drinking and sports hooliganism. The most infamous case of this occurred in the amphitheatre in AD 59, when a riot broke out between Pompeians and visitors from nearby Nuceria. In part this was a clash between home and away supporters. But Tacitus, the Roman historian who describes it, refers darkly to "illegal gangs". The upshot was a complete ban on gladiatorial games in the town for 10 years.

## Z is for Zanker and other books on Pompeii

My book *Pompeii: The Life Of A Roman Town* focuses – as the title suggests – on daily life. I can also recommend Paul Zanker's *Pompeii: Public and Private Life* (Harvard UP, 1999) for insights into the development of the town and its architecture, and Alison E Cooley and MGL Cooley's book *Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Sourcebook* (Routledge, 2013). Among other things, the latter collects together and translates some of the most evocative of the Pompeian graffiti. **H**

**Mary Beard** is professor of classics at the University of Cambridge, and the author of *Pompeii: The Life Of A Roman Town* (Profile Books, 2008)





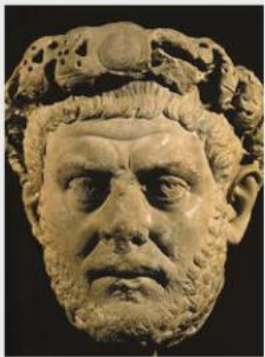
A barbarian takes arms against a Roman legionary

# THE ENEMY WITHIN

After centuries of expansion, in the third century AD, Rome hit the buffers. **Peter Heather** explores the reasons for the empire's decline



## ROME'S LATER EMPERORS AND BARBARIAN KINGS



**Diocletian**  
(LIVED AD 245–312)

This Roman emperor expanded the army to fight off the Persian menace, and overhauled tax-raising mechanisms in order to pay the bill. He inaugurated a system of detailed censuses that allowed the empire to tax agricultural production effectively.



**Constantine**  
(272–337)

Constantine reorganised the Roman army into garrison troops and elite field forces. He also completed Diocletian's governmental reforms and converted the empire to Christianity. He and his successors portrayed themselves as God's vice-regents on earth, brought to power by the divinity.



**Sidonius Apollinaris**  
(c439–489)

Letters by this Gallo-Roman aristocrat show landowners of southern Gaul making peace with barbarian kings as the western Empire's power failed. This has been taken to prove weak allegiance. Yet the landowners' assets were geographically fixed, so they had little choice.



**Alaric** (370–410)

The first king of the Visigoths, a people formed from the union of two separate Gothic groups in 376, plus the survivors of a third that invaded Italy in 405/6. This new supergroup was too large for the Roman empire to defeat. All of the barbarian forces at the heart of the successor states went through similar processes of amalgamation.



**Euric** (415–484)

The Visigothic king Euric was one of the first to realise that the west Roman state had become so weak that it could be ignored. From 469 he launched a series of campaigns that, by 476, had expanded the area he controlled from the Bordeaux region to encompass most of France south of the Loire, and nearly all of Spain.

By the beginning of the third century AD, the Roman empire had reached its greatest geographical extent. Edward Gibbon, the 18th-century author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, dated its golden age to the Antonine period of the mid-second century, but the 190s had seen still further territorial gains in the near east. At this point the empire stretched from Hadrian's Wall to Iraq on one diagonal and from the mouth of the Rhine to Morocco on the other.

Right across this vast area, land-owning elites had bought into Roman values. They wore togas, enjoyed wine and olive oil, lived in villas, served on town councils and purchased classical educations for their children. Emperors were gods, and those who had originally been conquered now happily acknowledged the divinely ordained correctness of all things Roman.

In the 230s, however, order and prosperity vanished overnight. The internal political stability of the second century gave way to a succession of more than 20 emperors in 50 years. The root cause of the trouble was the rise to superpower status of the Persian empire, now under the new management of the Sasanian dynasty.

Between 230 and 260, this rejuvenated Persia united the near east as never before,

**“Emperor Valerian was captured by the Persian King Shapur I – and after his death he was skinned and kept as a victory trophy”**

and inflicted three huge defeats on Roman emperors, one of whom – Valerian – was captured and led about behind the Persian King Shapur I until his death, at which point he was skinned and kept as a victory trophy.

### The price of protection

To face up to Persian aggression the Roman army needed to increase in size, which in turn generated both fiscal and political crises for the state. The new troops needed to be paid, and the new Persian threat demanded that an emperor be available more or less full time in the east. This in turn caused usurpation in the west, where Roman elites felt that their interests were being ignored.

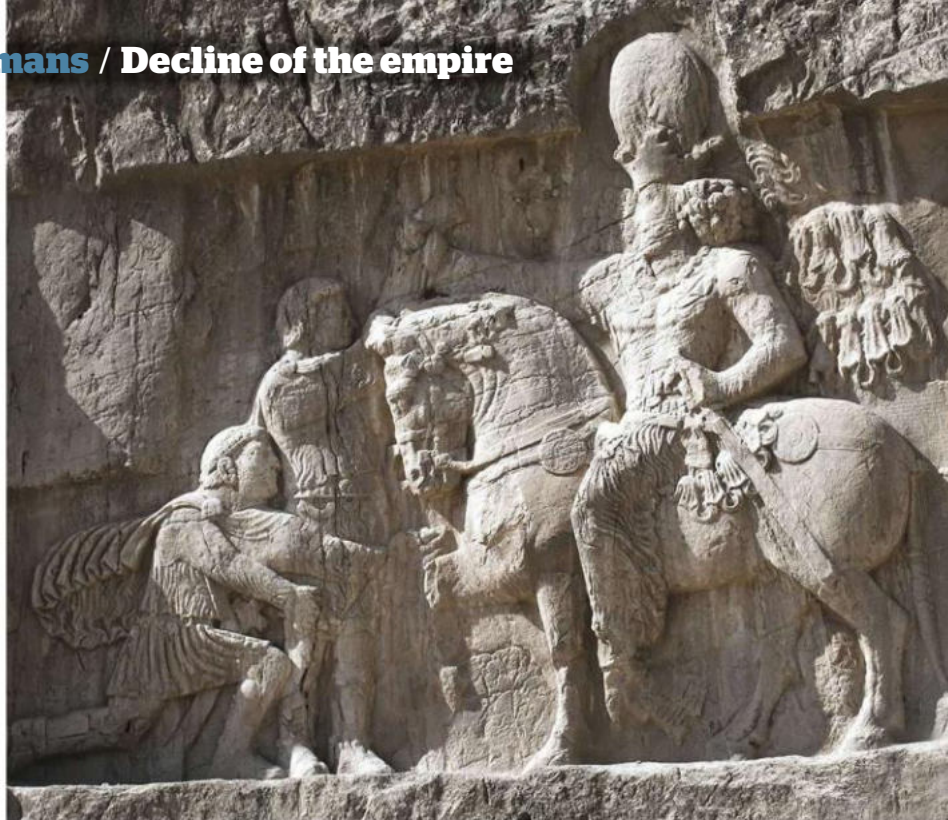
It took two generations and a huge governmental effort to adequately respond to the Persian threat but by the fourth century parity had been restored. Between them, Diocletian and Constantine dealt with many of the military and fiscal problems, and there is every sign that the fourth-century empire was economically prosperous and culturally vital, and that it successfully commanded the active allegiance of its land-owning elites, even if they now served in the imperial bureaucracy rather than on their town councils.

The later Roman empire certainly had its limitations, particularly at the level of high politics, where friction and even civil war between its multiple imperial courts was endemic, but it was nowhere close to collapse. Meanwhile, internal conflict between Persian emperors meant that they could no longer inflict the kind of defeats on Rome that they had in the third century.

It was at this time that Rome split into eastern and western sections. The eastern half of the empire – built on the same institutional framework as the western, with a similar economy and much the same pattern of political participation – was able to carry on for centuries after the west collapsed. Thus we know it was not the empire's internal structures that doomed the west.

The story of western Roman collapse certainly shows that outsiders – ‘barbarians’,





A third-century relief from Naqsh-e Rostam in Iran depicts the humiliated Emperor Valerian defeated by Persian King Shapur I – but Roman power was far from depleted

“The western Roman empire was **sucked into a vicious circle**: each barbarian success reduced its revenues and the **size of its armies**”

as the Romans called them, largely Germanic-speaking – played a major role in the action. In 376 two large groups of Goths crossed the Danube into Roman territory; two years later they won a huge victory over the eastern emperor Valens, killing him and more than 10,000 men – two-thirds of his army. Because of this defeat, in 382 the Roman state was forced to license the Goths’ continued semi-autonomy on Roman soil.

Under Alaric, the descendants of these Goths subsequently moved into Italy, where they were responsible for sacking the city of Rome in 410, before settling in south-western Gaul in 418. This settlement gradually developed into the independent Visigothic kingdom which, on the deposition of the

last west Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus in 476, stretched from the river Loire to the Strait of Gibraltar.

The other successor states to the Roman west were created in similar fashion. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain were created around Germanic-speaking invaders, and a Burgundian-dominated kingdom emerged after 450 in south-eastern Gaul. Germanic Suevi generated a kingdom in north-eastern Spain, Vandals and Alans created one in North Africa, Franks another in northern Gaul, and yet more Goths – Ostrogoths – eventually took control in Italy. After 476, very little of the Roman west was under the control of rulers descended from internal Roman rather than outside stock. And

in each case a connected narrative leads from original invasion to settlement in a limited area of Roman territory, and then onto a process of self-assertion that created an independent kingdom. This is well known; barbarians have played some role in all accounts of Roman collapse. With the third-century crisis now cut down to size, and the inherent vitality of the later empire fully recognised, however, the role of these barbarians has become correspondingly larger.

## Assessing Attila

The most famous barbarian of them all was undoubtedly Attila the Hun who, between 440 and his death in 453, instigated a reign of terror from Constantinople to Paris and more or less everywhere else in between. But, on closer inspection, even his significance sinks more into the background. He never even tried to conquer the Roman empire, contenting himself instead with running a large-scale protection racket, demanding money from it with menaces.

Much more important were the anonymous kings who led the earliest incursions of Huns, first onto the fringes of Europe north of the Black Sea in c 370 then, a generation later, onto the Great Hungarian Plain at the heart of Europe. For it was the panic generated by these incursions that in turn pushed the two great waves of largely Germanic invaders onto Roman soil: the Goths and a few others in 376, and more Goths together with Vandals, Alans and Sueves in 405–6. It was these barbarians inside the empire, not the Huns outside it, who posed the real danger.

The reasons for this are straightforward. The Roman state derived most of its revenues from taxing agriculture, these revenues paying for the army and all other central structures that gave the state its existence. Whenever a barbarian group fought with a Roman army on Roman soil, the capacity of that area to produce tax revenue was severely reduced. A reduction of six-sevenths seems to have been typical. And whenever a barbarian group annexed or was settled by treaty on a piece of Roman territory, that area produced no tax at all.

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## TIMELINE THE DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

### AD 297

**Rome defeats Persia** – a turning point indicating that the third-century crisis has been overcome.

### AD 332

Constantinople is made imperial capital of the east. From now on, there is usually **more than one emperor**.

### AD 376

**Goths cross the Danube**, marking the first stage of Hun-induced crisis in barbarian Europe.

### AD 405–8

**The second stage of the Hunnic crisis** is marked by more barbarian invasions. The British provinces are told that the main empire can no longer protect them.

### AD 418

**Goths settle in Aquitaine** under treaty. The western Roman empire is forced to concede land to barbarians.

### AD 439

**Vandals and Alans seize Carthage**: the western empire loses its richest north African provinces.



A fifth-century silver coin of the Huns





**A fourth-century Roman relief in Cordoba shows a plentiful olive harvest. We now know that rural activity reached a peak after the third-century crisis**

Especially after 405/6, therefore, western Rome found itself sucked into a vicious circle. Each military success by barbarian forces reduced its revenues, the size of its armies and, hence, its capacity to resist future aggression. By 420 the western Roman state lacked the funds to replace properly the soldiers it had lost since 405/6. Military listings of that time show garrison troops being regraded into field army units, rather than any proper new recruitment. And in the years that followed, the problem only got worse. Over the next two generations, the western Roman state withered away for lack of funds to keep its armies intact. In many parts of the Roman west, Roman landowners – such as Sidonius Apollinaris (see box on page 95) – still existed, but they had no choice except to reach an accommodation, if they could, with whichever barbarian power had become dominant in their area.

Barbarians were clearly, therefore, the agent of revolution – but were they also its cause? Looked at closely, barbarian history does provide good reason to think that stronger barbarians rather than a weaker empire provide the real explanation for imperial collapse. Germanic Europe, it has become clear, underwent its own revolution in the Roman period, developing a much larger and more dense population on the back of much more productive agriculture. By the fourth century, this population was also organised into larger, better-armed and more coherent political entities, better able to resist Roman imperial aggression. Much of this revolution was generated by political, economic and even

cultural interactions with the Roman empire, explaining why the Goths of the year 376 could not easily be defeated.

### **Making enemies**

Once on Roman soil, moreover, the revolution gathered pace. All of the kingdom-forming groups (Visigoths, Vandals, Ostrogoths) were not ancient pre-existing units of the Germanic world but instead new and much larger entities that had formed once actually on Roman land. Creating the first of these groups – rather than sacking Rome in 410 – was the prime historical legacy of the Gothic leader Alaric. These previously separate forces had come together in the first place to defend themselves against Roman aggression. For every barbarian invader who survived to form a kingdom, there was another who suffered military defeat and death.

Having united initially to survive, these groups then found themselves perfectly placed, under a subsequent generation of leaders such as the Visigothic king Euric, to expand the territory under their control, as central Roman revenues and power ebbed away. So the roots of Roman collapse lay not in a weakening of the Roman world, but in the way in which the non-Roman world developed over 500 years in response to the dangers and opportunities of living next to a large, economically powerful and aggressive neighbour. **H**

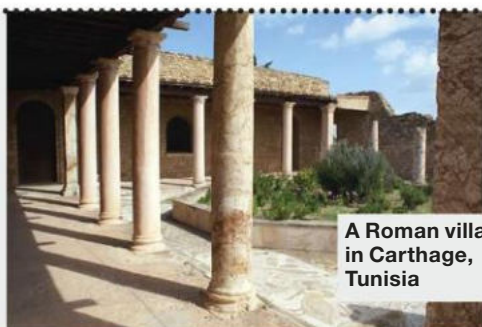
**Peter Heather** is professor of medieval history at King's College London, and author of *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (Macmillan 2005)

## **OUR CHANGING VIEWS ON ROME'S FINAL DAYS**

From Gibbon to the 1960s, the crisis in the third century was thought to herald the end of the Roman west. Apart from **political instability** and **military defeat** by Persia, **hyper-inflation raged**, laws attempted to tie peasants to their lands, and barbarians came to occupy increasingly prominent positions in the army. By the 280s, as the story was traditionally told, **the empire was running headlong towards disaster** until two strong emperors – Diocletian and Constantine – pulled it back from the brink, if only temporarily and at great cost. Higher taxes paid for a larger army but, in the long term, crippled the economy, while landowner allegiance was now commanded rather than voluntarily given. The fourth-century empire never recovered from the third-century crisis, or so long-held wisdom decreed, and in the fifth century was simply waiting to collapse.

Since the 1970s, however, new archaeological methods have shown that – for the vast majority of the empire – the fourth century was the period of **maximum rural activity** within the entire Roman imperial era. There is plenty of evidence for flourishing inter-regional trade, too. Roman hyper-inflation, likewise, was not similar to its 20th-century German counterpart. Caused by debasement of silver coins, **it did not affect middle- and upper-class Roman wealth** – held in the form of land and precious metals – and had no analogous political effects.

Culturally, too, the fourth century was immensely innovative, with **highly educated upper-class Christians** radically transforming both their new religion and classical culture. The lack of landowner interest in town councils, similarly, was caused by the fact that they now had better options. In particular, becoming an imperial bureaucrat came with privileges (such as setting your neighbour's tax bills) that made such men the natural leaders of local society. It is no longer possible, therefore, to view the fourth-century empire as a dilapidated structure teetering on the brink of collapse.



**A Roman villa in Carthage, Tunisia**

### **AD 455**

Under the emperor Avitus, Goths and other barbarian powers start to be **included in western Roman politics**.

### **AD 468**

**The last Roman attempt to reconquer Africa is defeated.** Other barbarian powers seize territory for themselves.

### **AD 476**

With no money left in imperial coffers, the last western emperor, **Romulus Augustulus, is deposed.**

**Coin showing a helmeted Augustulus with spear and shield**







# OTHER CIVILIS

Sophisticated cultures that emerged in China, Iran and Central America over 2,000 years ago forged empires to rival – and in some cases eclipse – those more famous dominions of Egypt, Greece and Rome





# ATIONS



LEFT Fifth-century gold armlet from Tajikistan  
BELOW LEFT Lion-griffin ornament, also from Tajikistan  
BELOW Lapis lazuli statue from Persepolis.  
Fine crafting of precious metals and minerals was characteristic of Persian art and crafts

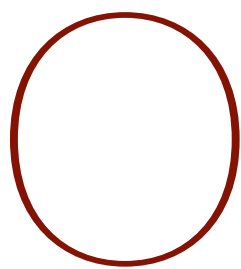




# PERSIA

## THE EMPIRE THAT SPANNED THE WORLD

How did a once-backward kingdom come to rule lands stretching from north Africa and Greece to India and central Asia? **Tom Holland** explores the multi-ethnic state forged across the Middle East 2,500 years ago



On a hill-rimmed plain in southern Iran stands a tomb of stone, looking for all the world as though a tent has been perched on a ziggurat. This striking monument

was already over 1,000 years old when, in AD 640, the conquering armies of Islam first swept into Persia. Locals, keen to preserve the monument from the destructive zeal of the Muslims, informed their new masters that the tomb was that of Solomon's mother.

The invaders, respecting the memory of a king who had been hailed in the Qur'an as a prophet, devoutly preserved it. The truth of whose tomb the monument actually was had long since been forgotten. Not even the Persians themselves had any real conception of their country's ancient past.

Only in the west, among their former

**“The achievements of Cyrus II two centuries before Alexander the Great were even more astounding”**

enemies, was it still remembered that the Persians had once been the rulers of the most powerful empire in the world. Those who could read the histories of the Greeks knew that in distant times one of the Persian kings had led an immense invasion force from Asia into Europe across a bridge of boats, and had almost succeeded in conquering Greece.

Alexander the Great, invading Asia in turn, claimed to be doing so in revenge. Yet even

he, who had proved himself the bane of the Persians' empire, remained in awe of the achievement of its creation. Like the Muslim conquerors a millennium later, he visited the tent-shaped tomb in southern Iran. Unlike the Arabs, he needed no one to tell him whose it was.

“Mortal,” an inscription ran on the tomb. “I am Cyrus, who founded the dominion of the Persians, and was king of Asia. Do not begrudge me then my monument.” Nor did Alexander begrudge it. Ordering the tomb's lavish refurbishment, he sedulously paraded his respect for the one conqueror he was prepared to acknowledge as his peer.

Indeed, the achievements of Cyrus II two centuries previously had been, if anything, even more astounding than those of Alexander. The Persian, unlike the son of Philip, had seemed to emerge to his greatness from nowhere. In 559 BC, when Cyrus II came to the throne, the kingdom he ruled was backward and inconsequential. The Persians



Persepolis, the centrepiece of the Persian empire, was destroyed by invader Alexander the Great. The site is now one of the great treasures of ancient history



themselves, originally nomads from the steppes of central Asia, had barely intruded upon the consciousness of the region's great powers – yet by the time of their king's death 30 years later they had subdued them all. From the Aegean in the west to the Hindu Kush in the east, Cyrus II had made himself the master of an empire without parallel.

He had also launched a novel and far-reaching experiment in geopolitics. Cyrus II had not merely conquered his enemies – he had wooed them, too. Though certainly not averse to the occasional salutary atrocity, his preference, by and large, had been to live up to the high-flying claims of his own brilliantly crafted propaganda. Once his regime had been established over the corpses of toppled empires, further bloodshed had been kept to the barest minimum.

His diktats had worn a moderate and gracious tone. To kingdoms far older than his own, venerable with temples and celestial pretensions, Cyrus II had presented himself as a model of righteousness, and his rule as a payback from the gods. Peoples from across the vast span of his empire had duly scrambled to hail him as their own.

Astonishingly, Cyrus II – the man who had, in the awed words of the prophet Isaiah, made “the world tremble from end to end” – would be remembered, with an almost unqualified admiration, as the architect of a universal peace. For centuries afterwards, even among its bitterest enemies, the glow of its founder's memory would suffuse the empire of the Persians. “He eclipsed all other monarchs, either before him, or since”: such was the verdict not of a fellow countryman but of Xenophon – a Greek.

### Kingdom in crisis

Nevertheless, as Cyrus II's body was interred within its stone tomb in the summer of 530 BC, it must have seemed to many that the dominion of the Persians, deprived of its founder's charisma, was doomed to vanish as rapidly as it had emerged.

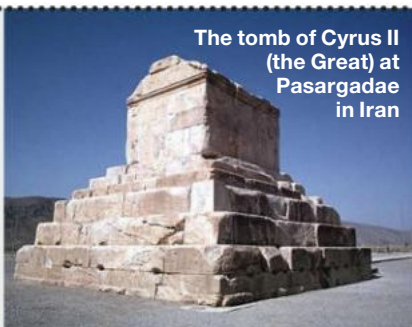
In the event, Cyrus II was succeeded without mishap by his son Cambyses, who briskly showed himself to be a chip off the

BRITISH MUSEUM/GETTY IMAGES

## TIMELINE

### 559 BC

**Cyrus II becomes king of the vassal state of Persia.** In 550 he deposes his grandfather Astyages, king of Media. The legendarily rich Croesus is overthrown by Cyrus II four years later. Babylon submits in 539.



The tomb of Cyrus II (the Great) at Pasargadae in Iran

### 530 BC

#### Cambyses succeeds

**Cyrus II**, who died from battle wounds. Five years later he successfully invades Egypt. The Egyptians never forgive him; Cambyses is remembered ever after in Egypt as a lunatic, given to murder and to gibbering mockery of the gods.

### 522 BC

#### Cambyses dies in Syria en route home to suppress a revolt

led by his brother Bardiya. On 29 September, Bardiya is ambushed and murdered. **Darius**, leader of the assassination squad, **is proclaimed the new king.** A year later, Darius is securely established as the King of Kings.



## “Darius’s success would mark him as the supreme political genius in the history of the Middle East”

old block by invading and conquering Egypt. Yet the moment of crisis for the infant empire would prove to have been merely postponed, not resolved.

In early 522 BC, Cambyses was informed that his younger brother Bardiya had raised Persia in open revolt against him. Hurrying back from Egypt, he died in mysterious circumstances mid-journey. Bardiya duly laid claim to the *kidaris* – the fluted tiara of royal power – but only a couple of months later, as he descended the mountain road that led to Babylon, he was ambushed by an assassination squad of seven noblemen and hacked to pieces. It was now the turn of one of his murderers, a young and brilliant relative of the royal family by the name of Darius, to seize the *kidaris* – and with it the throne of the world.

Yet in the first desperate year of his reign it seemed as though the usurper might inherit

**MAP** The Persian empire reached its peak at the time of Darius, c500 BC



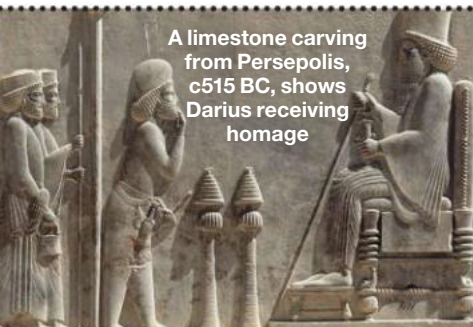
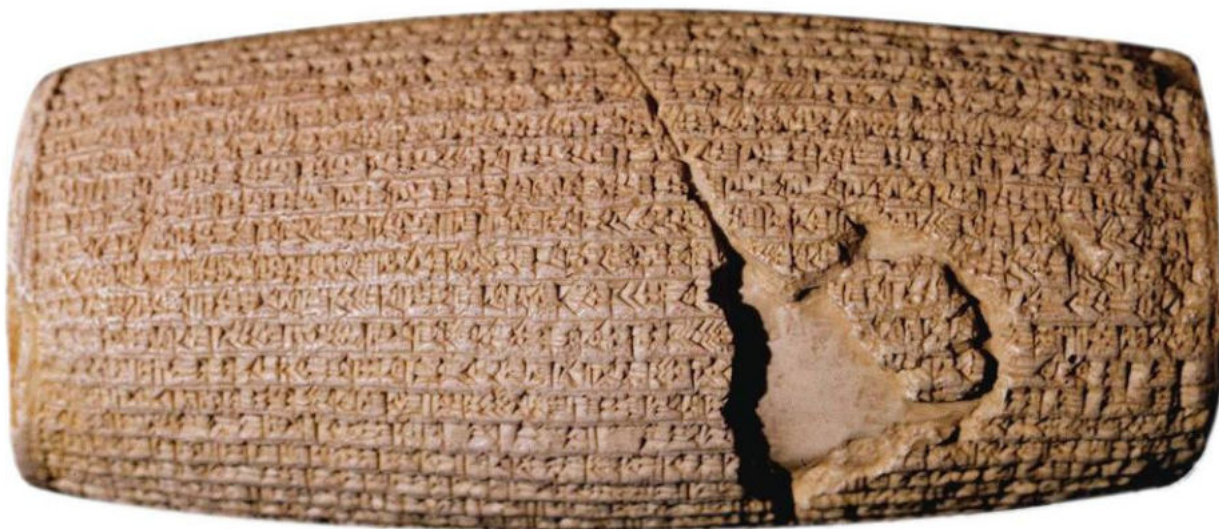
nothing. In province after province of the empire, and even in Persia itself, pretenders emerged suddenly from the shadows, laying claim to the bloodlines of toppled dynasties and to the glories of vanished empires. Ancient ambitions, briefly stifled by Persian rule, blazed violently back into life. Only through a supreme demonstration of ruthlessness and will was Darius finally able to stamp them out.

By the summer of 521, Darius’s triumph could no longer be in dispute: he had proved himself the ‘King of Kings’. Such was

certainly the title Darius most gloried in – less because he viewed foreign kingdoms as his fiefdoms (though he did) than because it gratified him to pose as the very summation of royal virtue. The dominion raised by Cyrus II, having been preserved from dissolution, was now, in effect, to be founded a second time – and a global monarchy, secured anew, was to spell a global peace.

Darius’s success in securing these dazzling goals would serve to mark him as perhaps the supreme political genius in the history of the Middle East. Like the Roman emperor

The clay Cyrus Cylinder records in cuneiform script Cyrus II’s account of his conquest of Babylon, in what’s now southern Iraq, in 539 BC



A limestone carving from Persepolis, c515 BC, shows Darius receiving homage

### 499 BC

**The Greek states of Ionia, on the Aegean seaboard of what is now Turkey, revolt against Persian rule. Athens joins the insurrection, which is finally suppressed six years later. In 490 BC, a Persian task force sent to burn Athens is defeated at the battle of Marathon.**

### 480 BC

**Xerxes, Darius’s son and successor, leads an invasion of Greece. He triumphs over the Spartans at Thermopylae and burns Athens, but his fleet is defeated at Salamis. Xerxes retreats, and his army is defeated at the battle of Plataea the following year.**

### 465 BC

**Xerxes is murdered and succeeded by his son Artaxerxes, whose reign marks a period of consolidation. The palace of Persepolis, begun by Darius, is completed; a revolt in Egypt is suppressed and a treaty with Athens is signed.**



## MAKING A REPUTATION: PERSIA THROUGH GREEK EYES

How could any empire as splendid and history-shaping as that of the Persians have ended up 'forgotten'? The answer lies in its failure to record anything we might recognise as history. True, in the aftermath of his usurpation Darius penned a thunderous self-justification, but otherwise the Persians left nothing that can be identified as an account of actual events. Instead we are dependent to an alarming degree on the writings of others. These, coming as they do principally from the Greeks – who were invaded, occupied and pillaged by the imperial armies – tend not to provide a balanced portrait of the Persian character and achievement.

There are three obvious tacks to take. The first is to accept Greek prejudices at face value, and see the Persians as effete trouser-wearers who somehow, inexplicably, conquered the world. The second is to condemn everything the Greeks wrote about Persia as an expression of racism, Eurocentrism and a host of other thought-crimes. The third, and most productive, is to explore the degree to which Greek misinterpretations reflected the truth, however distorted, of how the Persians lived and saw their world. This approach has been adopted by a formidable band of scholars over the past 30 years, with spectacular results: a whole empire has been brought back to life, rendered so solid that it has become, in the words of one historian, "something you can stub your toe on".



A piece of fourth-century BC black-figure pottery gives a Greek impression of a Persian archer

Augustus, he achieved a great labour of renewal and innovation that would cast its shadow over millennia. Darius had not spent the first years of his reign shoring up the empire for nothing; he was resolved never again to see it threatened by collapse. With his habitual display of energy, he threw himself into the most overwhelming task of administration that any monarch had ever faced: nothing less than to set the Middle East, and far beyond it, upon an ordered footing.

The ramshackle system of tribute that had prevailed under Cyrus II and his sons was streamlined and reformed; levies in every province, to the limits of the known world, were carefully fixed; a punctilious mastery of fiscal policy served to pull the empire back from the brink. All very well for the Persians, sneering behind their king's back, to mock him as a shopkeeper – but the empire, and their own greatness, would have been as nothing without accounts.

### The value of everything

To Darius, tribute receipts were not merely the stuff of dusty archives but of splendid and sacred drama. "The gold was brought from Sardis, and from Bactria, and fashioned by craftsmen here, and the precious stones that were used here, lapis lazuli and carnelian, these were brought from Sogdiana" – so visitors to one palace were grandly informed, in rolling tones of pride. The detail of a tax payment, safely logged inside an archive; the glinting on a palace door of rare and precious metals, quarried from a mountain range far away; the portrayal on a frieze of some humble tributary – a Greek, or an Egyptian, or a Babylonian, his submission forever frozen by the pattern of the design: all spoke with perfect clarity of the timeless nature of Persian power.

Significant as the bloody practicalities of imperial rule were to Darius, so also was their shadow: his sacral vision of a universal state, one in which all his vast dominion had been imposed for the conquered's good. The covenant embodied by Persian rule could not, in his view, have been any clearer: harmony in exchange for humility, protection for

## "It was the destiny of the King of Kings to bring peace to a bleeding world"

This stone relief from Persepolis depicts gift-bearers paying tribute with a vase. Darius kept detailed accounts of taxes and tributes across his empire



abasement, the blessings of a world order for obedience and submission. Here were momentous formulations for global conquest without limit. After all, if it was the destiny of the King of Kings to bring peace to a bleeding world, then what could those who defied him possibly be, save the agents of anarchy and evil?

Tools of darkness as they were, insurrectionists menaced not merely the Persians' empire but also the very cosmos that it mirrored. It was with a sense of divinely sanctioned mission, then, that Darius ordered his generals to compel the submission of fractious Athens, and prepared himself, when the expedition met with an unexpected reverse on the plain of Marathon, to send an even larger task force to subdue the whole of Greece.

Even for the King of Kings, however, this was to prove an ambition too far. Darius died in 486 BC, and when his son Xerxes, who had succeeded to the imperial throne, finally launched the great invasion of Europe, crossing the bridge of boats on his chariot, he could not conquer the Greeks. Humbled in the straits of Salamis and in the dust of Plataea, the Persians found further westward expansion permanently blocked to them.

### 401 BC

Civil war breaks out when Artaxerxes II is challenged for the throne by his younger brother, **Cyrus**. Cyrus leads an army reinforced by 10,000 Greek mercenaries from the Aegean to the Euphrates, but is defeated and **killed at the battle of Cunaxa**.

### 386 BC

The King's Peace is forced upon **Greece**. Artaxerxes II guarantees the autonomy of the Greeks in exchange for their acknowledgement that the Greek cities of Asia should belong to Persia. Greek nationalists are outraged: "Do we not name him the Great King," one complains, "as though we are his slaves?"

### The tomb of Artaxerxes II in Persepolis



### 338 BC

Artaxerxes III is murdered by Bagoas, a power-hungry eunuch. Bagoas sponsors a new king, Artaxerxes IV, before disposing of him two years later. He installs upon the throne a Persian nobleman with a reputation for bravery, **Darius III**, who promptly kills his treacherous patron.





Xerxes was obliged to accept a truth that had never forced itself upon his father: even the mightiest of empires can suffer from over-stretch.

Yet, though it pleased Greek propagandists exulting in their victory to stereotype the Persians as so irredeemably soft and degenerate that they even – horror of horrors – wore trousers, the greatness of the King of Kings remained as formidable as ever. The intimidating edifice of the empire was to endure unscathed for a further century and a half following Xerxes' defeat in Greece. Even then, its ruin was brought about only by the lethal genius of history's greatest general.

Alexander himself has justly been described as the last of the Kings of Kings. Conqueror though he was, he found himself thoroughly dependent upon the frameworks of Persian administration to uphold his own power. The rapid implosion of Alexander's empire following his death emphasises just

how remarkable an achievement that administration had been.

The Persian empire is often neglected in discussions of the ancient world's great powers. Yet though her influence, certainly in comparison with that of Greece, has always been indirect, occluded and underground, it has ultimately been no less profound. The political model established by Cyrus II and Darius would serve to inspire empire after empire: it was the achievement of the Persian kings, one so epochal that its effects are with us still, to demonstrate the very possibility of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, world-spanning state. ■

Tom Holland is the author of *Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West* (Little, Brown, 2005)

### 331 BC

**Darius III is defeated by Alexander the Great at the battle of Gaugamela.** Alexander enters Babylon and burns Persepolis. Meanwhile, Darius has fled eastwards in a desperate attempt to keep Persian resistance alive, but is murdered by one of his own followers. **The Persian empire is thus brought to a squalid end.**



A mosaic from Pompeii depicts Darius III in battle

## GREEN PARADISE: PERSIA'S GREAT GARDENS

The Persians, according to the Greek historian Herodotus, taught their sons three things: to ride, to shoot and to tell the truth. He might have added a fourth: horticulture. Even kings prided themselves on their green fingers; perhaps only the hunt could rival gardening as a passion of the court. To combine the two was true fulfilment. Rare was the aristocrat who did not have his own park, well stocked with game, with lakes and murmuring streams, pavilions and lovingly manicured lawns, plants of every description, herb gardens and flower beds, pear and apple trees, pines and cypresses, sunk into the soil and perfumed with the scents of exotic blooms. Empire fostered a veritable mania for botany.

Darius always kept himself abreast of the latest horticultural innovations, tirelessly encouraging his satraps (provincial governors) to experiment with cuttings and collect rare seedlings. One hawkish minister, eager to encourage Xerxes in his invasion of Greece, had assured their plant-loving master that Europe was one vast garden-centre, "the nursery of every kind of tree". Perhaps no other aspect of Persian civilisation has contributed more to the sum of human happiness. There is certainly no Persian word more familiar to the modern world than the name that the King of Kings and his nobility gave to their exquisitely beautiful parks: paradise.



Apple blossom and fragrant pine: Persian nobles made much of their gardens



Legacy of Persian paradise: the garden of 15th-century Sultan Husayn Bayqara



# THE EMPEROR'S SECRET ARMY



Over 2,000 years ago, huge battalions of Chinese warriors were brought together - crafted in clay to guard a dead emperor.

**Dan Snow** reveals the story behind the creation and discovery of the Terracotta Army

The warriors take many shapes, as shown by this kneeling archer  
RIGHT: Bureaucracy was included, too - this figure depicts a civil official



The spring of 1974 was hot and dry in Shaanxi province, north central China. As rivers dried up and the water table dropped, those who lived off the land were growing increasingly desperate for new sources of water, and farmers set to work digging new wells. In late March one of them noticed something strange: as he dug down, the colour of the soil was changing. Five metres below the surface he uncovered a terracotta face. Word spread fast, and by July a team from Beijing had begun a thorough investigation. They soon found a vast number of shattered, life-sized terracotta figures. The news spread across the world in a flash: the farmer had stumbled across one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century.

One mile to the west loomed the man-made mound housing the tomb of Qin Shihuangdi, called the First Emperor. Within a few months of digging it became clear that this collection of terracotta figures was linked with his tomb. In fact, it was an entire army created “to guard Qin Shihuangdi’s tomb,” says Jane Portal, keeper of Asia collections at the British Museum. Jane was a student when she first visited the site in 1979; at that time, “only a fraction” of what is now on display had been uncovered.

“His tomb was created so that he could go on ruling for ever in the afterlife,” Jane explains. “It consists of an underground governmental system. The army is just part of the exercise which, as we dig, we realise is larger than we ever thought.”

Incredible as it seems, the magnificent terracotta figures are by no means the main focus of the tomb. They’re merely the gatekeepers to a vast necropolis. After 36 years and thousands of hours of excavation since Jane’s first visit, the scope and scale of the First Emperor’s tomb complex is still unclear. Though the earth has yielded a vast array of finds, spread out over 56 square kilometres, there will be a lot more to come.

In 221 BC Ying Zheng, the king of Qin, emerged victorious from a war that for 250 years had torn apart much of the area now known as China. A decade of conquest saw him annex competing states such as Chu and the once-mighty Zhao. In 221 BC the last state, Qi,

surrendered without a fight. The title king of Qin no longer did justice to a man who had achieved the unthinkable: uniting all of the warring states together in one empire. He coined a new title, Qin Shihuangdi, which roughly translates as ‘Divine August Emperor of Qin’. It was a statement of intent. He was planning to be merely the first of 10,000 generations of divine emperors who would rule this vast new empire.

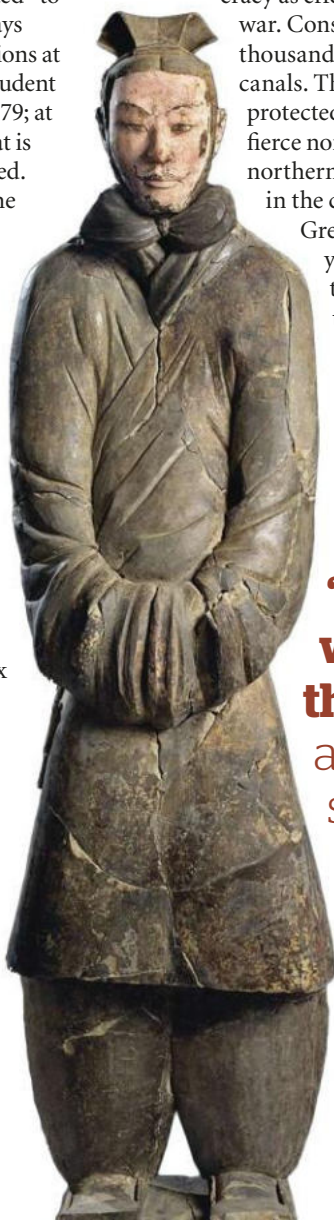
Qin Shihuangdi is one of the most important political figures in history. He took a divided collection of states and welded them into an entity that would survive to the present day. Though China would suffer periods of upheaval and division, the idea of a united China has not been seriously challenged since.

Today, China is rapidly becoming a true superpower. Its far-flung provinces and different ethnic groups are brought together by a powerful cultural and linguistic centrifugal force that owes much to Qin Shihuangdi’s reign.

The First Emperor mobilised his bureaucracy as effectively in peacetime as in war. Conscript armies of hundreds of thousands worked on roads and canals. The various walls that protected the warring states from the fierce nomadic tribesmen of the northern steppe were joined together in the construction of the first

Great Wall of China, 1,500 years before the Ming wall that attracts floods of tourists today. He standardised weights and measures, established a currency that lasted to the 20th century and even insisted on a universal

**“No two warriors are the same. Eyes are different shapes, facial hair varies and some are more portly than others”**



## FACTFILE

### The Terracotta Army

#### For whom was the Terracotta Army made?

Qin Shihuangdi, the ‘First Emperor’, who united warring states to create the country of China.



The First Emperor

#### Why was the army made?

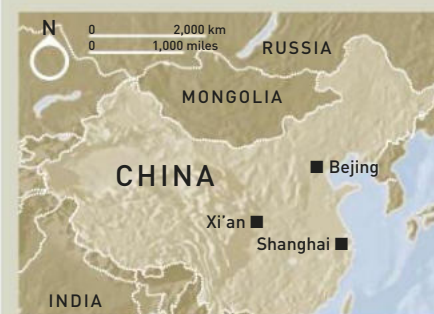
To protect the emperor in the afterlife.

#### When was it created?

Work on the warriors seems to have finished at his death in 210 BC.

#### Where is it?

Outside Xi’an in Shaanxi province, China.



#### How were the figures made?

Component parts were mass-produced, then each warrior was hand-finished.

#### How many warriors have been found?

Estimates suggest that about 8,000 figures have been uncovered, including just over 7,000 soldiers and 700 horses.

#### How many more are thought to exist?

Archaeologists think that they may have found all of the warriors. However, more pits containing figures and weapons stores have been found over time, so more warriors could be discovered at some point. The results of a second excavation of Pit Two, begun in May 2015, are hotly anticipated.



An aerial view of the tomb mound of the First Emperor near Xi’an



“The figures stand in **battle formation**, officers commanding from a few **horse-drawn chariots**”

An infantryman wears armour incorporating many square plates  
BELOW: The First Emperor's Terracotta Army consists of perhaps 8,000 warriors

length of axles for carts so that ruts would be the same distance apart on each of the country's roads. Perhaps most importantly of all he unified the Chinese script, suppressing regional variations – and making certain that from then on the people of his new empire would all speak the same language.

### The boy king

Work on Ying Zheng's tomb had been proceeding ever since his accession to the throne of Qin as a boy. No doubt plans were revamped to reflect his vastly enhanced status as the most powerful man on Earth. Before the chance discovery in 1974, all that was known for sure about Qin Shihuangdi's tomb complex was the location of the central mound. It is a pyramid that today stands 76 metres high, eroded down from perhaps 100 metres when it was built. The only description of what might be inside came from a single written history, compiled 100 years after the First Emperor's death – the *Shi-Ji* records of the 'Grand Historian', Sima Qian.

That description was long thought to be fanciful. According to Sima Qian, the tomb mound contained a hoard of treasure as well as a replica of the universe complete with gems on the ceiling representing the stars. On the ground lay a model of Qin Shihuangdi's domain, bounded by mercury representing the rivers and oceans of the Earth.

Finding the terracotta warriors, which were not even mentioned by Sima Qian, forced historians to accept that the almost mythical stories about the power of Qin Shihuangdi and the opulence of his tomb may have a good deal of truth to them. Subsequent finds and scientific tests have provided more corroboration for Sima Qian's account. High levels of mercury were found in the soil of the mound, and in June 2007 the Chinese announced that they'd used ground-penetrating radars to confirm the existence of a 30-metre-high chamber inside the mound.

The tomb was reputedly the work of around 700,000 workers, some of whose remains have been exhumed from pits near the mound. Though construction went on for 40 years, Jane Portal doesn't think it was completed: “The First Emperor died suddenly in 210 BC, and it is thought that the tomb complex was unfinished at the time, because one of the four pits, intended to be filled with terracotta figures, was found empty.”

Despite this, some 8,000 terracotta figures have been discovered – a little more than 7,000 men and 700 horses, divided between three pits. Pit One is a vast oblong space covering 14,260 square metres, holding figures standing in battle formation and officers commanding from a few horse-drawn chariots. Pit Two holds a mixed force of





cavalry and infantry, while Pit Three contains a small collection of senior officers.

It's important to remember that no-one ever saw the figures as they are displayed today. They were placed in tunnels underground with a wooden roof above them. Despite all the care and artistry lavished on them, they were not designed to impress the living, but instead protect the dead.

The figures stand nearly 2 metres high and, as well as being collectively magnificent, are each an individual work of art. They were mass-produced, then hand-finished. Different body shapes and sizes came out of moulds, and each was stamped by the relevant workshop to ensure quality control. Artisans then undertook the fine-tuning. As a result, no two are exactly the same: eyes are different shapes, and strands of hair are individually represented. Close inspection of the backs of the warriors' heads reveals an array of buns, plaits and braids. Facial hair varies from soldier to soldier, and some are noticeably more portly than others.

Various types of soldier are clearly delineated. There are senior officers, hands on hips, exuding leadership; there are also lightly armed troops, archers, heavy infantrymen, cavalrymen, even bureaucrats. To make them even more lifelike, the figures were coated in colourless lacquer, then painted. Traces of this garish colouring remain on a couple of the warriors; a method pioneered by German archaeologists ensures paint will no longer flake off as figures are excavated. The faces, coats, trousers and shoes would have been a heady mix of bright blues, reds, yellows and greens. They would all have been holding real weapons appropriate to their role: bronze swords, crossbows, spears.

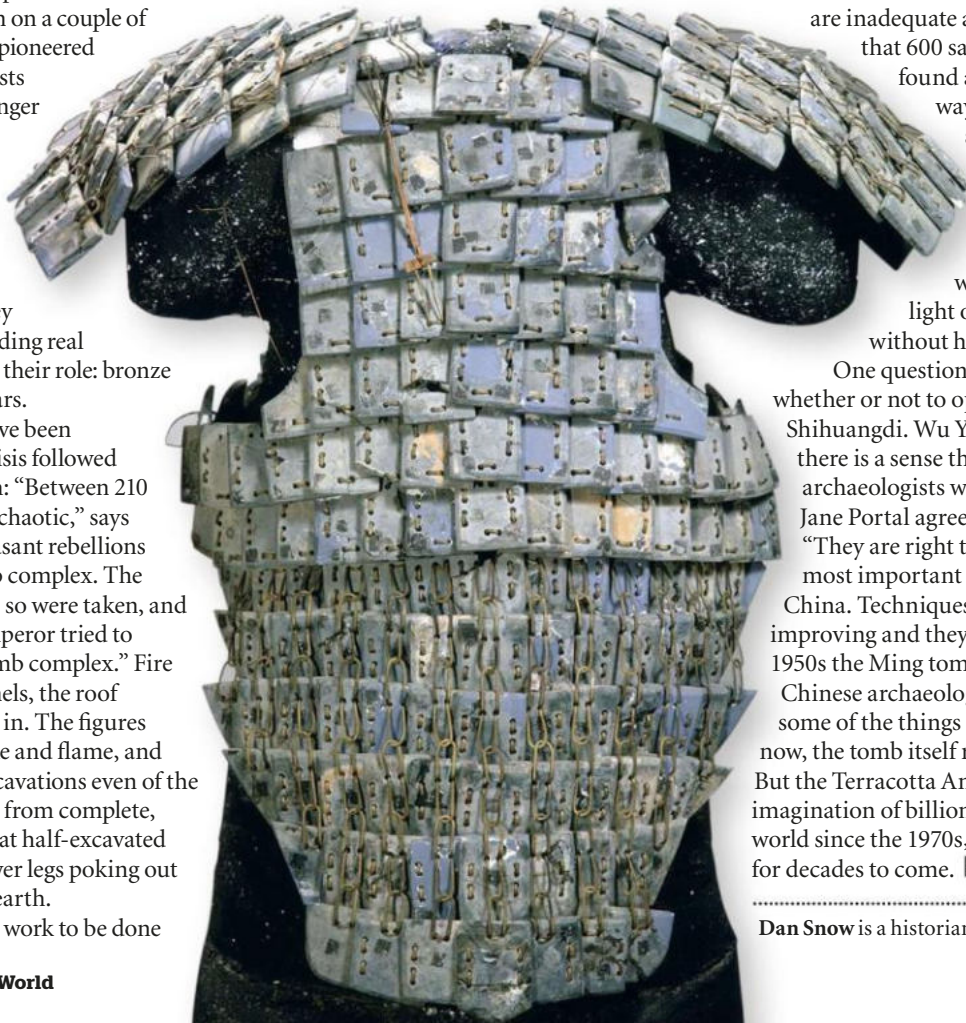
Very few weapons have been recovered, however. Crisis followed Qin Shihuangdi's death: "Between 210 and 206 BC China was chaotic," says Portal. "There were peasant rebellions and looting of the tomb complex. The weapons were valuable, so were taken, and enemies of the First Emperor tried to destroy much of the tomb complex." Fire raged through the tunnels, the roof collapsed and earth fell in. The figures were damaged by smoke and flame, and eventually crushed. Excavations even of the original pits are still far from complete, and visitors look down at half-excavated smashed torsos and lower legs poking out from the surrounding earth.

There are years more work to be done



One pit contains stone armour plates – notice the holes in each piece

A reassembled set of armour made from overlapping scales of stone found near the First Emperor's tomb



on the terracotta figures alone, and many new finds have been made in the compound surrounding the tomb mound. Slowly but surely all of the inhabitants have been moved off site and re-housed. A more intractable problem is a sewing machine factory built just inside where the outer wall of the tomb complex would have been. It was erected during the cultural revolution when, in the words of Wu Yongqi, director of the Terracotta Warriors Museum, "there was no law."

## Armour plates

In the shadow of the factory lies one of the most recent pits discovered – the Stone Armour Pit. "It was found in 1999," says Portal, "and so far 87 sets of stone armour and 43 helmets have been found. It's a giant armoury for spirit warriors in the afterlife, for use seemingly against demons." Each suit of armour is made out of hundreds of overlapping scales of stone. They would have been hanging in rows until the pillars supporting the roof collapsed; some suits have been reassembled since their discovery, but to date only a fraction of the 13,600-square-metre pit has been excavated.

The enormity of the challenge posed by just this one pit is daunting to Wu Yongqi. Bizarrely, his greatest fear is that "there will be more finds". His overstretched resources are inadequate as it is. He points out that 600 satellite pits have been found already. These extend way beyond the area surrounding the tomb mound. He talks of an area 500 kilometres square, and "dreams of a day when technology sheds light on all that's buried" without having to dig by hand.

One question that divides everyone is whether or not to open the tomb of Qin Shihuangdi. Wu Yongqi is against it, but there is a sense that some of the younger archaeologists want to reveal its secrets. Jane Portal agrees with Wu Yongqi: "They are right to be cautious. It is the most important archaeological site in China. Techniques of conservation are improving and they should wait. In the 1950s the Ming tombs were excavated and Chinese archaeologists have regrets about some of the things that were done." For now, the tomb itself remains undisturbed. But the Terracotta Army, which has fired the imagination of billions of people around the world since the 1970s, will continue to do so for decades to come. **H**

Dan Snow is a historian and broadcaster



# THE APOCALYPSE

The end of the world is nigh... So proclaimed doom-mongers in the run-up to 21 December 2012 – date of the apocalypse, as the ancient Maya foretold. Or did they? **Rob Attar** tackles seven questions about this once-mighty pre-Columbian people and their predictions

A global poll conducted by Ipsos in 2012 found that 10 per cent of people believed the world was very shortly about to come to an end. The source of that global fear was a rather curious one: the ancient Maya. According to many experts, the Maya's Long Count calendar reached the end of a cycle on 21 December 2012 – at which point, numerous nervous individuals feared, an overwhelming apocalypse would be unleashed. Some more optimistic people, conversely, hoped for a New Age-style global transformation.

The Maya 'prophecy' embedded itself in popular culture. Websites speculated on humanity's chances of surviving 2012, while Hollywood was also caught up in the excitement. The 2009 blockbuster movie *2012* envisaged the human race almost wiped out by cataclysmic events, as heralded by the Maya. "We were warned," was the tagline on the film's poster, and at one point during the action a character sagely notes: "The Mayans saw this coming thousands of years ago." But is any of this actually true? And, if not, why did the belief become so ingrained?

Robert Attar is editor of *BBC History Magazine*

## 1 Who were the Maya?

The question should really be: who *are* the Maya? Because this is a culture that still exists today. Several million modern Maya inhabit parts of Mexico and Central America, as they have for millennia.

There is evidence for the Maya civilisation in these regions as far back as the second millennium BC, and by the third century AD the civilisation had become urbanised. That marked the beginning of the era known as the Classic Period that lasted until AD 900, during which time the Maya became arguably the most advanced of all of the pre-Columbian civilisations. From the 10th century, the Maya suffered a period of decline, with many cities being deserted.

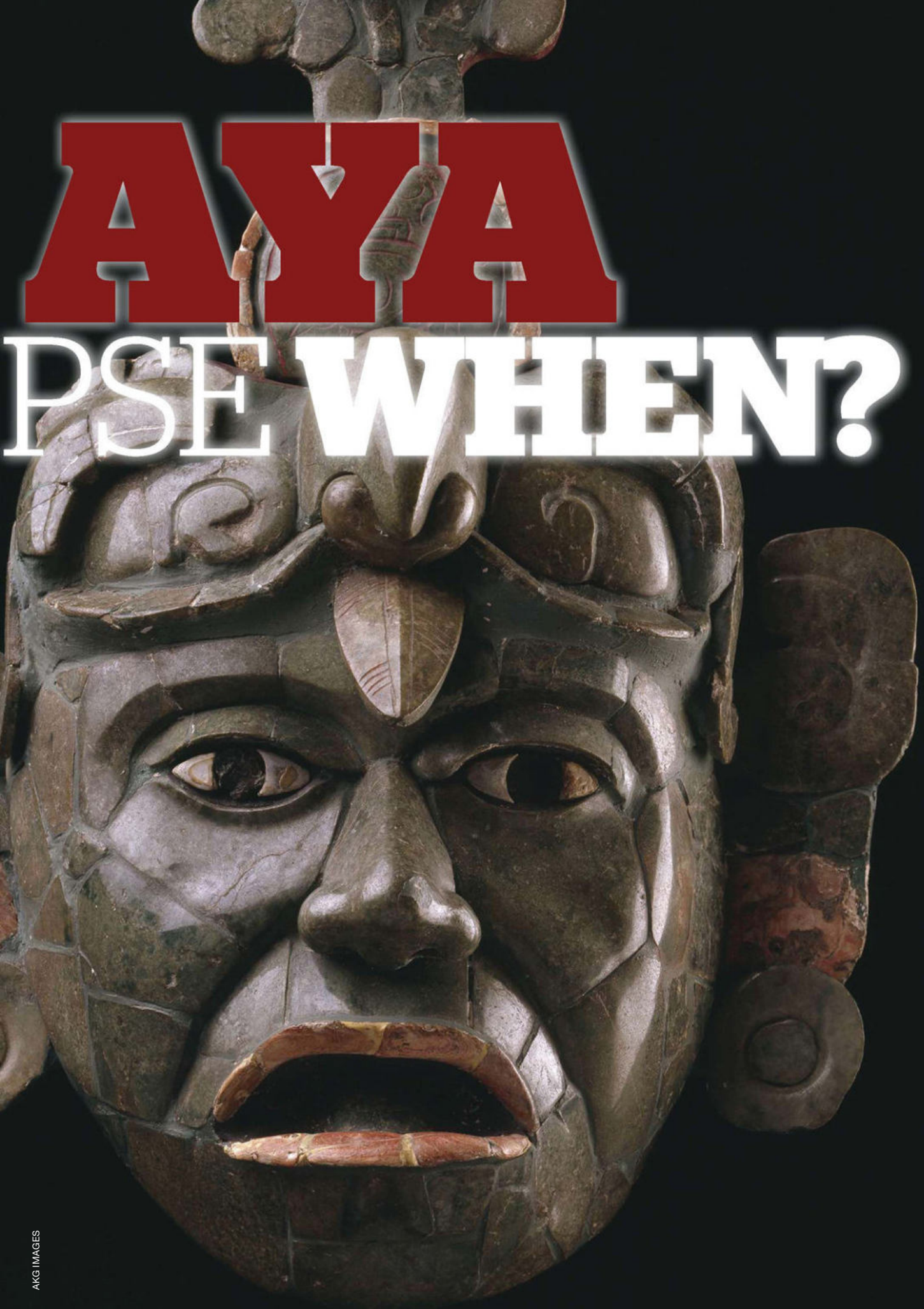
Following the European discovery of the New World, Maya lands were conquered by the Spanish, and indigenous culture was influenced by that of the Old World, a notable impact being the widespread adoption of Roman Catholicism.

The obsession with the predicted events of 2012 focused on the Classic Maya, rather than the present-day inhabitants of the region.



A sixth-century AD Maya mask, made of jade, shells and pyrite. The Maya's Long Count calendar reached the end of a cycle in 2012, but the end of days predicted by some thankfully didn't materialise





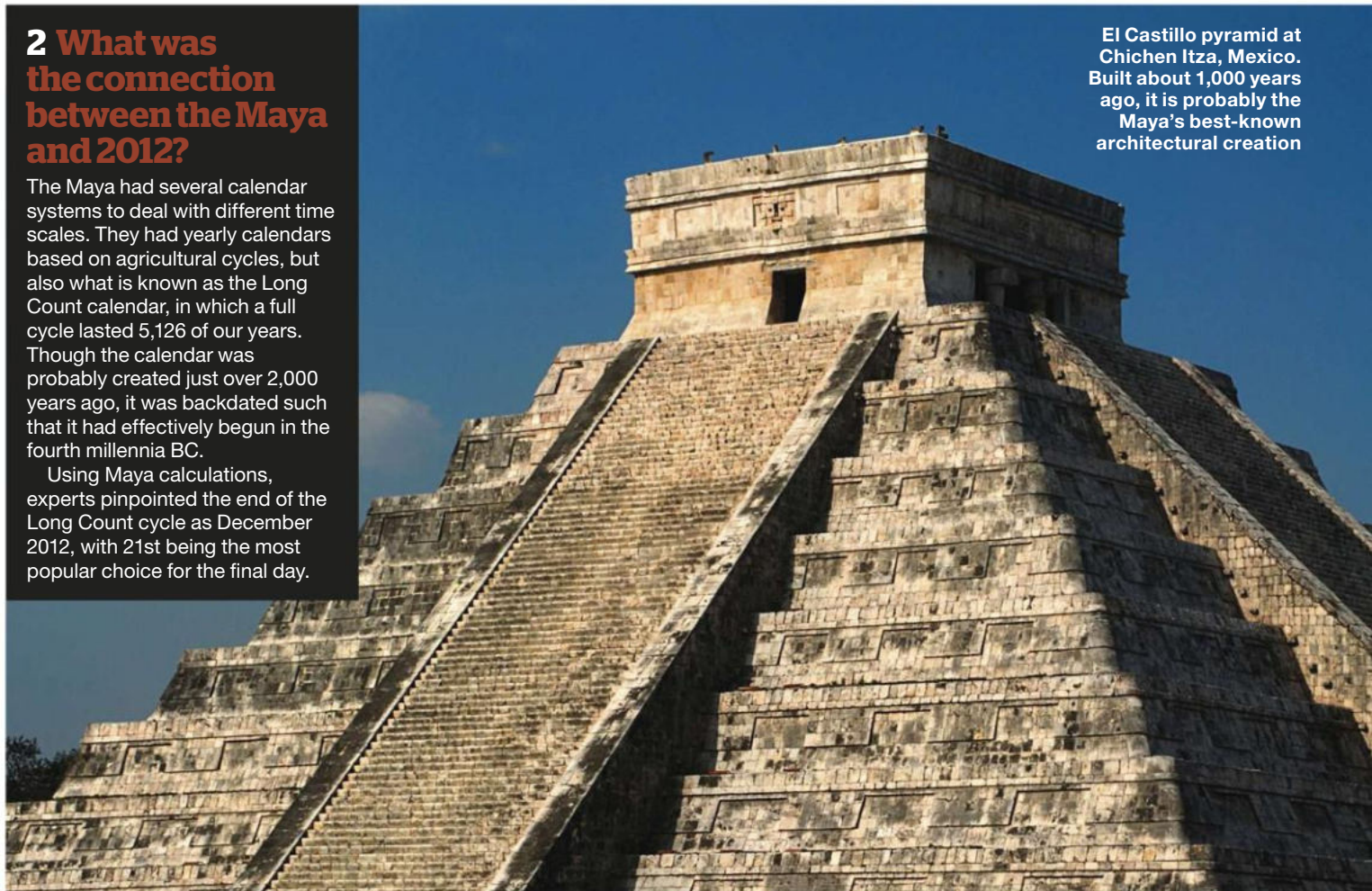


## 2 What was the connection between the Maya and 2012?

The Maya had several calendar systems to deal with different time scales. They had yearly calendars based on agricultural cycles, but also what is known as the Long Count calendar, in which a full cycle lasted 5,126 of our years. Though the calendar was probably created just over 2,000 years ago, it was backdated such that it had effectively begun in the fourth millennia BC.

Using Maya calculations, experts pinpointed the end of the Long Count cycle as December 2012, with 21st being the most popular choice for the final day.

El Castillo pyramid at Chichen Itza, Mexico. Built about 1,000 years ago, it is probably the Maya's best-known architectural creation



## 3 Did the Maya predict that the world would end in 2012?

Mayanists are fairly unanimous in answering with a resounding 'no'. In *The Order of Days: The Maya World and the Truth about 2012*, Professor David Stuart is unequivocal: "No authentic Maya text foretells the end of the world in 2012, or of any destructive event happening in connection with the turn of the thirteenth *Bak'tun* [a sub-period in the Long Count]."

Matthew Restall is a Maya specialist at Pennsylvania State University. He argues strongly against the apocalyptic scenario. "We don't know for sure what they believed would occur, and that's part of the point. They didn't write down in much detail what they thought was going to happen, and the way Mayanists interpret that is that it wasn't something that was of concern to them. It was simply a resetting of the clock. It's a bit like our own millennial calendar. We get to 1999 and the next year is 2000 and that cycle continues until the end of the following millennium and begins again."

Norman Hammond, professor emeritus of archaeology at Boston University, believes past evidence was stacked against a doomsday in 2012. "When we

reached the end of *Bak'tuns*, the Maya didn't make a big fuss about it. When we rolled over from the seventh to the eighth *Bak'tun* in AD 41 there was no big deal, and again when we rolled over from the eighth to the ninth in 435 there were a few monuments put up commemorating it – but not many, and they were simply noting the date. It's not like the fuss that was made about the year 2000 here."

There is in fact only one known Maya artefact that is widely agreed to make explicit reference to 2012: the Tortuguero tablet, discovered in southern Mexico in the 1960s. This monument features hieroglyphs that mention the end of the Long Count cycle but some of the text is unreadable, and from what is left no clear picture emerges of Maya beliefs about 2012. There is no doomsday prediction.

**An illustrated Maya vase from Guatemala, AD 600–800. Such items were valued as status symbols for the Maya**



## 4 Did the Maya have apocalyptic visions?

According to Matthew Restall, the pre-Columbian Maya had little interest in the apocalypse. "You have to look very hard to see any kind of concern with the end of the world. There are certain creation mythologies but not a lot about the world ending."

There are apocalyptic ideas present in more recent Maya writings, but Restall suspects they have a rather different origin. "They start to feel very familiar to us, with stuff about the second coming and Jesus

Christ returning. Where does all that come from? Obviously, it comes from medieval Christian Europe."

It appears that these ideas were introduced to the New World by the Spanish settlers, influencing Maya beliefs in the years after Columbus.





Maya hieroglyphs from the Palenque archaeological site in Mexico. This writing system was far from "a stilted picture language"



## 5 How did the belief in a 2012 apocalypse evolve?

The doomsday visions did not originate with the Maya and seem instead to come from the Old World. Unlike among the pre-Columbian Maya, there is a long-standing strain of apocalyptic thought in western civilisation that has its roots at least as far back as the Bible, with its notions of Messianic rebirth and the terrifying scenes in the Book of Revelation.

Western history contains several previous examples of doomsday predictions. One of the best known incidents involved the American preacher William Miller, who declared that the world was going to end in 1843, and attracted tens of thousands of followers to this belief. After that year passed without incident, Millerites revised the predicted date for doomsday to 1844 but were once again disappointed.

In more recent times there were fears for the year 2000, with another calendrical event apparently heralding global devastation. The modern concerns about 2012

seem to have stemmed from this tradition, rather than anything written by the Maya.

For such western prophets of the apocalypse, the ancient Maya have obvious appeal. That's partly because they built a relatively advanced civilisation that, with their sophisticated hieroglyph writing system and pyramid-style structures, bore superficial resemblance to the ancient Egyptians.

Furthermore, says Matthew Restall, an air of mystery hangs over the Maya. "There is this notion that the Maya civilisation collapsed and that they disappeared. Scholars have been saying for decades that they didn't disappear, and that the population declined dramatically for reasons that are not easy to explain. But still for hundreds of years there have been these incredible cities covered in jungle, and it did look as if a civilisation had risen up, developed an incredible writing system and then just vanished."

## 6 Has the 2012 fixation overshadowed other aspects of Maya studies?

On the whole, Maya experts welcomed the increased interest in their subject, even if it was based on a misconception. "What it means is that, even for the wrong reasons, people are actually becoming more interested in the Maya than they usually are," says Norman Hammond. "Several of my colleagues have written books about this, and people are going to read those. Then they'll decide that maybe there's more to the Maya than just the end of a calendar period, and perhaps investigate

further. It's a good way of getting out to a public that normally wouldn't be interested – and judging by some of the sales it's a good way of making some money!"

Matthew Restall agrees. "There's so little in reality in Maya civilisation about the apocalypse that, when people turn to the topic, within a few minutes they are being told about all this other stuff. They are being exposed to everything that is fascinating about the Maya and all the accomplishments of their civilisation."


## 7 What were the Maya's real achievements?

They might not have predicted the end of the world but the ancient Maya civilisation continues to fascinate scholars and the public at large – for good reason.

Some of the architecture they created is breathtaking and rightly world famous, notably the pyramid at the city of Chichen Itza in Mexico, which in 2007 was voted one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. But the impressive pyramid-temples, ball courts and other relics of powerful Maya cities survive in various sites across the region – notably Palenque, Uxmal and Calakmul in Mexico, Tikal in Guatemala, Lamanai and Caracol in Belize and Copan in Honduras.

The Maya also created, in Norman Hammond's words, "one of the great art styles of the ancient world. Their vase painting and sculpture are, I think, fully comparable with those of classical Greece."

Then there are the Mayan hieroglyphs, comprising the "one true writing system in the New World", according to Hammond. "It is capable of expressing subtleties of language pretty much as great as modern English. It's not at all a stilted picture language."

Despite the confusion to which it has led, it's also impossible to ignore the Maya calendar system, with all its complexities. The fact that the Maya were looking into both the past and the future in their calendars is truly remarkable. "They were playing with time as though it was numbers ratcheting up on a pinball machine," says Hammond. 



Tom Holland on... **the importance of the ancient world**

# “There has never been a more thrilling time to learn about the ancient world – nor a greater sense of urgency”

“Nabonidus, who in 556 BC seized the throne of Babylon in a coup, was obsessed by ancient history. As the lord of the Land Between Two Rivers, he was ideally placed to pursue his fascination. Mesopotamia was the birthplace of everything that distinguished civilisation from barbarism: writing, high-rise buildings, hierarchy.

Imperialism, too. Akkad, a region to the north of Babylon, was where a king had first dreamed of conquering the world, in around 2300 BC. Sargon, the obscure adventurer who had emerged as though from nowhere to nurture this ambition – to extinguish the independence of neighbouring city states, and rule supreme over the ‘totality of the lands under heaven’ – was the primal archetype of a Mesopotamian strongman. To the usurper Nabonidus, this ancient king, who had lived almost two millennia before him, provided the ultimate model.

Which was why, when a statue of the great man was excavated in Akkad, Nabonidus came rushing in high excitement to inspect it and to supervise its restoration. A victory slab inscribed by Sargon’s grandson was lovingly dusted down and put on prominent display. Collecting antiquities became a positive craze. In the fabulously ancient city of Ur, for instance, Nabonidus’ daughter, the Princess En-nigaldi-Nanna, maintained a carefully labelled museum “for the marvel of all beholders”. Meanwhile, in Babylon, scholars pored over great libraries of archives, tracing ancient documents, recycling archaic phrases, looking to the distant past to legitimise the needs and whims of their masters. The people of Mesopotamia, living as they did amid the lumber of millennia, had always been profoundly respectful of antiquity. Far from feeling oppressed by it, they recycled it, and turned it to their advantage.

The past, though, did not always provide a reliable guide to the future. In 539 BC, Nabonidus was toppled from his throne by the Persian king Cyrus. Babylon’s independence was ended for good. Mesopotamia found itself absorbed into an empire vast beyond the dreams even of Sargon. Stretching from the Aegean to the Hindu Kush, it was cast by Cyrus and his heirs as an earthly mirror of the order of the heavens.

This, though, proved an illusion. As Babylon had fallen, so Persia fell. The cycle continued. Macedonian kings were followed by Roman plenipotentiaries; the rule of the Caesars by that of Caliphs. By 762, when the city

of Baghdad was founded on the banks of Tigris, no one remembered in Mesopotamia that such a king as Sargon had ever been. Even Babylon was only commemorated as a haunt of what the Qur’an condemned as “disbelieving devils”. It was as though all the millennia-spanning achievements and wonders of ancient Mesopotamian civilisation had never been.

Only in the 19th century were they finally restored to the light of day. The excavations that uncovered the history of Mesopotamia, stretching back from the reign of Nabonidus to the very beginnings of urbanism, were part of the much broader process of resurrectionism that saw European and American archaeologists reveal entire dimensions of the world’s ancient past. From Troy to Ashoka’s India, and from the Valley of the Kings to Machu Picchu, the buccaneering age of archaeology resulted in discoveries that still define how many of us visualise antiquity. Simultaneously, skills honed on analysing the Bible and classical texts had begun to be deployed on the written legacy of civilisations far less familiar to European scholars than those of Greece or Rome. Today, advances in archaeology have combined with an increasingly sophisticated understanding of how ancient sources are best read and understood to transform our understanding of antiquity. There are areas of study – early Islam being, perhaps, the most striking example – that are as contested and fast-evolving as any in the entire field of history. Never has there been a more thrilling time to read about the ancient world.

Nor, perhaps, has there ever been a greater sense of urgency about the need to understand it. Khaled al-Asaad, the director of antiquities at the Roman city of Palmyra in the Syrian desert, served as a living reminder that the days when it was only Europeans interested in the ancient past of the Fertile Crescent are long gone. Equally, his murder in 2015 at the hands of Islamic militants, who beheaded him after he had refused to abandon the ruins to which he had devoted his entire life, offers a reminder of a grimmer truth: that in the lands once ruled by Sargon of Akkad an interest in their ancient past has become a matter of life and death. On a placard attached to al-Asaad’s publicly exposed corpse, his killers condemned him as a “director of idolatry”: a declaration that now, in the original homeland of urban civilisation, an interest in its ancient glories can rank as a capital offence. Reading ancient history, and caring for what it has to teach us, has come to seem almost an act of defiance. **H**

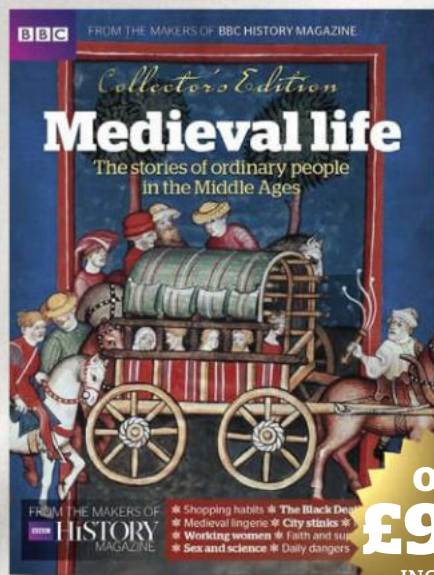
**Tom Holland** is an author and broadcaster. His most recent book is *Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the House of Caesar* (Little, Brown, 2015)





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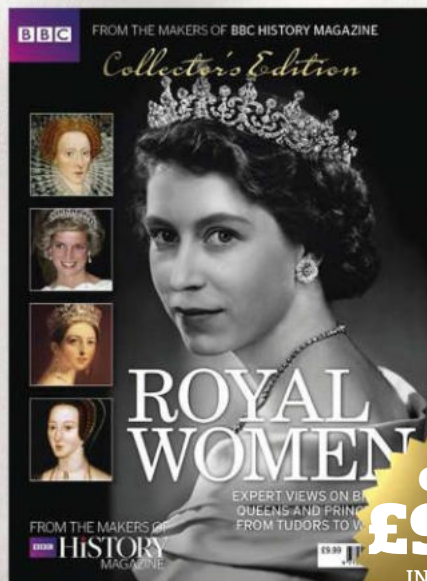


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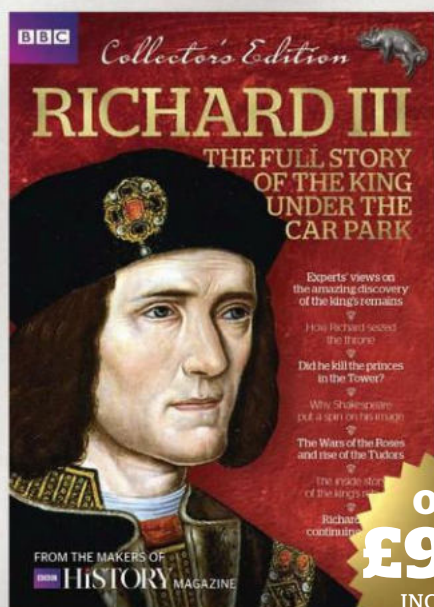


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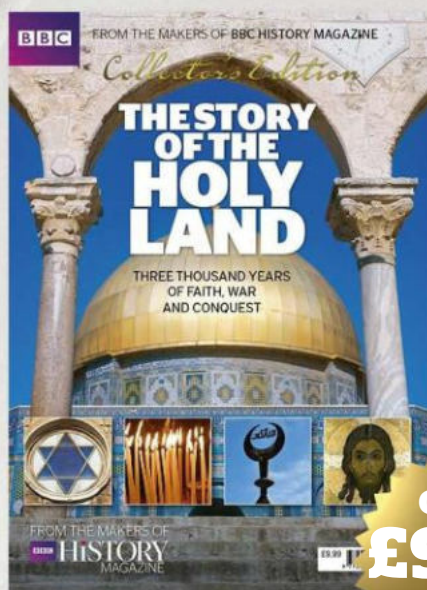


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**JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY'S GREAT CIVILISATIONS**



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